

***AFFIRMING ETHNIC IDENTITY,
COMBATING ETHNOCENTRICITY:
FOUNDATIONS FOR TRAINING CHRISTIAN LEADERS***

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PAUL BORTHWICK

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ABSTRACT

A significant challenge in cross-cultural leadership development is affirming the cultural, ethnic and indigenous identity of the leader while at the same time challenging any dangerous tendencies towards ethnocentricity, the idea that his or her ethnic or cultural identity is superior to all “Others.” These issues are addressed through a biblical and theological examination built on the assumption that God’s Word, both in its written form and in the person of Jesus Christ, simultaneously endorses cultural particularity while affirming the universality of humanity under God.

This universality is based on God’s creation of people and cultures, God’s plan for the redemption of all nations, Jesus death to create the Church as a new, united-yet-diverse humanity, and ultimately the multi-cultural assembly envisioned in Revelation, where people from every tribe, language, people and nation bring the treasures of their cultural uniqueness into worship. The implementation of this unity-in-diversity in the here-and-now for Christian leaders includes identifying our sinful tendencies to find our identity at the expense of others, realizing that every culture has something to teach us about God, caring for those who are “outsiders,” participating in God’s design to bless all nations, working towards reconciliation in the face of painful history, taking initiative to develop multi-cultural relationships, and working together to live out the “new humanity” described in Ephesians 2:11-22.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Terms and phrases like “unity in diversity,” “multiculturalism,” and the “global church” appear with greater frequency as the migration of peoples combines with issues like urbanization, globalization, and the growth of the church in the Majority World to introduce us to a tremendous missiological challenge – perhaps unprecedented in Christian history.¹ How do the global, cross-cultural realities of the Church affect the way we relate to each other?

Put simply – how do we relate to the “Other?”² How do we relate to people who may profess the same faith and acknowledge the same Lord, but whose culture, language, ethnicity, and history might be worlds away

¹ While the exposure to diverse cultures and contexts appears in the scriptures in the Book of Acts and elsewhere, the global awareness of others around the world and from many languages and ethnicities increased to staggering proportions in the 20th Century. This globalization of Christianity has laid the foundation for what historian/missiologist Andrew Walls calls “The Ephesian Moment.” Walls points out that the Christian church worldwide is becoming more culturally diverse than ever before, with the heartlands of Christian faith shifting from the West to Africa, Asia and Latin America (even as Christian presence continues in the West), and increasing migration (he cites UN figures suggesting that immigration could push the population of the US to 400 million by 2050). An important question, he suggests, is “whether or not the church in all its diversity will demonstrate its unity by the interactive participation of all its culture-specific segments, the interactive participation that is to be expected in a functioning body” (Andrew Walls, “The Ephesian Moment,” *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), 81.

² While the terms “Other” or “Otherness” are sometimes used in theology to describe the difference between humanity and God (as in “God is ‘Other’”), these terms are widely used in literature on the subject of ethnocentricity and the need for reconciliation between cultures. The “Other” simply refers to the person who is different, exotic, unique or distinct from my culture or ethnic group, but it often comes with a negative association that is demeaning or full of bitterness because of past historical animosity. For Miroslav Volf, a noted author on this subject, his “Other” is the Serbian forces who tried to commit genocide against his people, the Croats, during the 1990’s (see Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996)).

from our own – even to the point of being contrary to our own? And, in the cases of people who do not share our faith, how do we see and relate to them from a Christian perspective – as human beings loved by the God of the universe who created them in his image?

Though there are now many Christian resources addressing issues like diversity and reconciliation, many of those coming from North America (as we shall see) focus almost exclusively on the issues of reconciling specific peoples in our own contextual history, most notably American Blacks and Whites and to a lesser degree, Native Americans with descendants of European settlers. These specific resources are needed because they speak to specific issues, histories and inter-cultural conflicts, but there is little available as a biblically-based overview for all peoples entering into and confronting this globalized world.

In this study, I will endeavor to create such a resource dedicated to providing a biblical foundation for relationship with those who are “Other.” My goal in this research is to produce a leadership development training tool designed to help leaders serving in contexts of great ethnic diversity and divides to address the issues of culture, ethnicity, and diversity from a biblical/theological platform. The question I am attempting to address focuses attention even more specifically on leaders and leadership development:

How can we develop leaders who are serving in multiple cultural contexts so that they understand a biblical theology of ethnicity and culture

which will simultaneously help them to understand the value of ethnicity and culture yet also embrace the multi-cultural new humanity which Jesus died to create so that these leaders can also speak against ethnocentricity, work for reconciliation, and serve as biblical peace-makers?

Despite the explosive growth of church around the world, the issues of racial and ethnic tension often still remain. American churches often remain segregated – long after neighborhoods have changed. Tensions remain in Northern Ireland, and the church in South Africa is trying to discover peace together after apartheid. And, to underscore the issue at the core of this topic, it was less than fifteen years ago that Christians were killing Christians along ethnic lines in Rwanda. Why does such tension still exist – especially between people who consider themselves members of the Christian family?

Increased assertion of ethnic/cultural identity today within nations across the world puts Christian leadership in some very tough places, trying to identify with their own people but also trying to mediate peace, reconciliation, and the biblical ideals of unity. How does a Christian respond to the strengths of ethnic preservation, where groups desire to preserve values, traditions and some styles of behavior we have inherited from our parents and grandparents? The challenges increase if the leader represents people who have suffered racial and cultural prejudice as minorities, particularly at the periphery of power. If our community is

stressing our ethnic identity as a defense against prejudice and hostility, how do we welcome the “Other” who might come from the dominant group that has oppressed us? While Christian leaders are increasing in their understanding that their ethnicity is God’s gift, they must likewise discover how God will use it for the common good.

This research will examine the above key question and follow it with practical implementation: what training can be offered to teach Christian leaders to change the way they view others – so that they begin to see others first based on a common identity in Christ, second based on a common identity as persons created in the image of God, and only thirdly based on issues like ethnicity and culture.

In pursuing this research, I contemplated a variety of potential approaches. I considered offering a sociological analysis of culture and ethnicity. Or I could analyze the respective histories of peoples living in tension with each other. Or I could offer an overview of how missionaries of the past addressed the issue. Any of these methodologies could present a good analysis of the problem and where we have come from. But with the emphasis description rather than prescription, I decided that none of these approaches would necessarily provide a more pro-active approach to the question, and many would have been issue-specific or locally-focused, rendering the research limited in its usefulness.

As a result, I decided to take a more biblical/theological approach – looking at the biblical teaching related to the subject. I decided on this

direction for a variety of reasons. First, a perspective built on the scriptures can transcend any one particular culture, revealing universal truths, values and principles. These will need to be locally applied and contextualized, but the underlying truths will apply to all cultures. For example, if the Bible teaches that everyone is created in the image of God, it will affect the way people inter-relate and view the “Other” in every culture, even though the local application may differ.

Second, a biblical perspective will require leaders to wrestle with God’s perspective on the “Other.” A biblical look at Jonah or Peter (Acts 10) will force the reader to confront and release his or her own hatred towards “Others” who might have been historical enemies or overcome cultural stereotyping that keeps the Church separated.

And most significantly, a biblical/theological approach carries with it the potential of spiritual transformation and change, because God has promised that his word has power.³ Analyzing a problem is one thing, but transformation of people by the power of the Holy Spirit is the ultimate goal.

This thesis will begin with an overview of the issues that have raised this issue (the balance of Chapter 1). In Chapters 2 and 3, I will examine biblical themes from Genesis through Revelation as well as theological issues which address the subject of culture, ethnicity, diversity, and a biblical view of “the Other.” Chapter 4 will review literature on the

³ Hebrews 4:12.

subject and will highlight themes related to the subject apparent in a variety of theological, sociological, and missiological writers. Then, in Chapter 5, I will outline my approach to creating a training tool for use with Christian leaders designed to get them wrestling with this issue, after which I will present a course manual designed from this research for Development Associates International entitled “Culture, Ethnicity and Diversity.” Chapter 6 will summarize the research, after which I will offer Appendices related primarily to the Project designed as a result of this research followed by a comprehensive bibliography on the subject.

DEFINING KEY TERMS

Before proceeding to a discussion of the background of and conclusions about the question I am pursuing, certain terms deserve definition at the outset.

Culture: the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization⁴ defines culture as “*an integrated system of **beliefs** (about God or reality or ultimate meaning), of **values** (about what is true, good, beautiful and normative), of **customs** (how to behave, relate to others, talk, pray, dress, work, play, trade, farm, eat, etc.), and of **institutions** which express these beliefs, values and customs (government, law courts, temples or churches, family, schools, hospitals, factories, shops, unions, clubs, etc.),*

⁴ Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization, www.lausanne.org.

which binds a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security, and continuity.⁵

Ethnicity: ethnicity today is described in different ways. Some descriptions stress the biological, which is the racial nature of ethnicity. African, Korean, Chinese, Indian are more racial descriptions than social. Spanish, Irish, Polish etc are more social-cultural as they may share a common “white” race.

The most generally agreed upon understanding of ethnicity identifies the markers of a community that has certain features as a stable core. These could include cultural features or psychological traits that distinguish the community from other communities. The identification of these aspects of distinction of one community against another can be referred to as “oppositional identity” or even “oppositional ethnicity” – i.e., who we are in contrast to others around us. These identifiers usually persist in the community wherever it is located and throughout generations even across sociological or class differences. Examples include festivals, folk legends, understanding of history, etc.

Vinay Samuel explains that stressing the given, inherited nature of ethnicity “assumes that there is a fixed, unchanging core to the identity of a community. That core is its ethnicity. If that core has to do with values,

⁵ “Willowbank Report on Gospel and Culture”
http://community.gospelcom.net/printable_template.jsp?show_print=no&backPageID=14322&smp_l_sakey=44904.

habits, traits and characteristics the above description suggests that they are fixed and cannot be changed.”⁶

In general, definitions of ethnicity focus on belonging to a group. Ethnic groups are not races. Ethnicity is more precisely defined than race and logically different. Membership of an ethnic group does not confine you to a geographical place, or nationality or religion. This understanding focuses on shared origins and traditions – which may be objective or invented.

Hutchinson and Smith⁷ identify six points or variables that give definition to an ethnic group:

1. Common proper name.
 - a. Based on language or nationality.
 - b. There may be room for many subsets within the larger name.
 - c. Ethnicity may fluctuate over time.
2. An overarching story of a common ancestry, a story that may be true, myth or a combination. Being marginalized by the majority culture often defines one's ethnicity. It can also produce identification with a larger group. Example: a Kikuyu may identify

⁶ Vinay Samuel, “*Welcome to My House: Ethnic Diversity, a Gift from God to the people of God.*” Unpublished paper.

⁷ John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

with her tribe in Kenya, but may only refer to herself as a Kenyan or an African if she is in Europe or North America.

3. Shared historical memories – especially of an “oppositional” nature; i.e., defining ourselves against our historical opponents.⁸ Example: Jews use a word – *goyim* – to describe all people in the world who are not Jewish.
4. Common culture, including language and other traditions.
5. A link with some identifiable homeland.
6. Sense of solidarity with others from the same group, including loyalty and often solidarity in suffering.⁹

Donald R. Jacobs defines ethnicity as the “classification of a person or persons into a particular group based on factors such as physical characteristics (e.g., skin color, facial characteristics, body shape); cultural identity (e.g., language or dialect, religion), or geographic origin.”¹⁰

He goes on to explain the positive Christian view of ethnicity – based first and foremost on the example of Jesus. God’s endorsement of ethnicity and cultural specificity in the incarnation serves as the motivation for the cross-cultural adaptation of both the message and the method of communicating the Gospel:

⁸ Chris Hedges underscores the concept of oppositional identity in the title of his book, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Random House, 2002).

⁹ Related to Ethnicity, see also Sinisa Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers, 2004).

¹⁰ Donald R. Jacobs, “Ethnicity,” in A. Scott Moreau, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 323.

Since the founding of the church, ethnicity has been a fundamental reality of missions. For example, wherever intercultural evangelists have gone they sought to translate the gospel into the local language. They knew that the gospel had to be understood in local terms, they also knew that the gospel had to be lived in the local milieu. Jesus was the model. Even though he was God, he took upon himself a human body and was shaped in a particular cultural context – he was a Galilean Jew. That is the way God enters cultures and saves people. God takes CULTURE very seriously. So should intercultural evangelists. The gospel affirms culture in general terms. As the gospel enters culture as salt and light it actually enhances culture.¹¹

Ethnocentricity: ethnocentricity is the exaggeration of ethnic identity that affirms that one's own ethnicity is not only unique but is actually superior to the culture and ethnicity of others. Sharp defines ethnocentrism as "the unassailable belief that one's own ethnic group is superior to all others."¹² He goes on to explain that the term was coined by William Graham Sumner (1840-1910) and he defined ethnocentricity as: "the view of things in which one's own group is the center of

¹¹ Jacobs, "Ethnicity", 323.

¹² Douglas R. Sharp, *No Partiality: The Idolatry of Race and the New Humanity* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2002), 163.

everything. Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity and boasts itself superior and looks with contempt on others.”¹³

Particularity: a term used to identify the unique characteristics of individuals, families, communities, or cultures. It is generally a positive term – as in “One of the things that makes our culture unique (i.e., our particularity) is our music.” Andrew Walls uses this concept to help us understand what he calls the “indigenizing principle” related to Jesus’ incarnation and subsequently, the church’s expression in culture. Jesus came with cultural particularity – as a Jewish man born in Bethlehem at a specific time. Jesus’ particularity, according to Walls, is in contrast to the fact that Jesus came for all people, his universality. The fact that Jesus came as a specific man with a specific ethnic, cultural and historical identity (particularity) is offset by the fact that Jesus came for everyone, and as a result he belonged with all peoples, something Walls calls the “pilgrim principle.” Particularity will relate to the topic of this paper because it will be used in reference to ethnic identity.¹⁴

Racism: the use of race as the central criterion by which an individual or a group judges other people. “Racism or the presupposition that one’s own race is superior or better than another is a denial that all

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Andrew Walls, “The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture,” *The Missions-Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 3-15.

people have been created in the image of God.”¹⁵ If ethnocentricity is a cultural problem; racism is a biological one.¹⁶

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

The subject of this dissertation has been percolating in my mind and heart over three decades. While a student at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 1978, I took an elective “Social Action” class with two prophetic and provocative African-American sociologists, James and Mary Tillman. The class was simply entitled “Racism and Poverty,” but the required text – *Why America Needs Poverty and Racism: an Examination of the Exclusivity Compulsion in American Race and Poverty Relations*¹⁷ – built on their basic assumption.

Their premise basically stated that racism and poverty exists in America because the way that we develop our sense of identity in our culture causes us to “need” people beneath us in order to feel good about ourselves. Our “exclusivity quotient” (i.e., the ability we have to exalt

¹⁵ J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 50.

¹⁶ Sharp, *No Partiality*, 162. *Racism note*: while race and ethnicity are often used interchangeably, the word race has been often attributed to European colonial desires to distinguish people based on external characteristics (phenotypes) like skin color or facial characteristics. Race is most commonly used today to identify groups that have a sense of oppression at the hands of some dominant other group. While all peoples can be tempted towards ethnocentricity, racism often comes with an association of power over others – so that American slaves could see themselves as superior to their white masters (ethnocentricity), but the white masters had power to oppress the slaves (ethnocentricity plus power = racism).

¹⁷ James and Mary Tillman, *Why America Needs Poverty and Racism: An Examination of the Exclusivity Compulsion in American Race and Poverty Relations* (Atlanta: Four Winds, 1969).

ourselves over others – based on race, economy, gender, education, etc.) enables us to feel good about ourselves and leads to a host of “isms” including racism, classism, and sexism.

The Tillmans taught that Christians living with malformed identities formed at the expense of others, much like the Pharisees who thanked God that they were neither Gentiles nor women, could offer no solution to the problems of racism or poverty. Until we understand what it means to find our identity “in Christ,” we will have no alternative to the “exclusivity quotient” at the core of our society.

The Tillman’s course and book shook me deeply because it made me confront my own racism, but the impact of the course lay dormant in my heart for almost a decade.

Then, in 1986-87, while researching and writing the book that would eventually be published as *A Mind for Missions*,¹⁸ I encountered a quotation from Dr. E. Stanley Jones concerning the impact of racism in South Africa on Mahatma Gandhi. Jones observed, “Racialism has many sins to bear, but perhaps the worst sin was the obscuring of Christ when one of the greatest souls born of a woman was making his decision.”¹⁹

At this time, I was working full-time as a Missions Pastor, a position that exposed me to a much wider world. Jones’ quote confronted me head-on with the reality of the historical and contemporary impact of those

¹⁸ Paul Borthwick, *A Mind for Missions* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1987).

¹⁹ Quoted by Philip Yancey, “Gandhi and Christianity,” *Christianity Today* (April 8, 1983), 16.

who call themselves followers of Christ and yet maintain their racist and ethnocentric worldviews. I began re-visiting the “identity-formed-at-the-expense-of-others” critique of the Tillmans, and I started looking more critically at my own ethnocentricity.

Later in 1987, I met my first black South African Christians engaged in the resistance and overthrow of the Apartheid regime. For the first time, I learned of organized racism that used a biblical defense to support their political views.

At that same conference of international Christian leaders,²⁰ non-Western leaders lashed out with a scathing critique of the Western church and the ethnocentricity implicit in our excited welcoming of the “Global Village.” They pointed out the ethnic and cultural destruction that accompanied our naïve Western acceptance of the monoculturalism that accompanied the ideology of globalization.

That year concluded at the Urbana 87 conference. Ajith Fernando, Youth for Christ leader from ethnically divided Sri Lanka, was the Bible expositor. He was preaching out of the book of Jonah. In his fourth message, in reference to Jonah’s objection to God (Jonah 4:1-3), Ajith mentioned in passing, “For some reason, racism seems to be one of the last sins that God touches.”

Ajith went on preaching, but his off-handed remark really got me wondering: Why does racism still exist with those who are supposed to be

²⁰ Singapore 87 for Younger Leaders, organized by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, met June 1-10, 1987 at Singapore University and included roughly 300 leaders from 65 nations.

“new” in Christ? Why is this sin one of the last sins that God touches? Does God not care? Or are the Tillmans correct – that as a result of the Fall, we all really need some other culture or ethnicity to hate or look down upon so that we can feel good about ourselves?

As involvement in the Global Church continued, my wife and I joined a small leadership development organization in 1998 called Development Associates International. Through the partners and associates in this ministry (see below) and our ongoing exposure to leaders in the global church, my questions about ethnicity and ethnocentricity continued to evolve. These historical realities contributed to my pursuit:

Rwanda and Burundi: in the early 1990’s, Dr. Jim Engel started researching the “disconnect” between leadership development training in the missions world and the apparent integration of this training into the character of the leaders. Then, in 1994-95, the reports of the inter-tribal warfare and genocidal massacres of Hutus towards Tutsi and *visa versa* in Rwanda and Burundi started making the global news.

Dr. Engel observed, “These are Christians killing Christians.” He observed that Rwanda and Burundi had been held forth as stellar examples of the “East African Revival” that began in Rwanda in 1936 and thrived into the 1960’s and 1970’s. Engel starting asking, “What went wrong? How can those “revived” twenty years earlier now be slaughtering fellow Christians – simply based on ethnic differences?”

He went on to discover, as we shall in this study, that the issues of what went wrong were a combination of historical factors, cultural expressions of ethnocentricity, and a severe expression of identity-at-the-expense-of-the-“Other.” But most significantly from a missiological perspective, the Hutu Christians had not been challenged to relativize their Hutu identity to their primary new identity, namely that they were first and foremost “in Christ.” In addition, their ability to exercise violence on their enemies was at least in part a product of a highly individualized presentation of the Gospel which allowed them to enter a relationship with God through Christ (vertical) without also realizing that redemption expresses itself horizontally in the acceptance of the “Other” – in their case, the Tutsis.²¹

Engel’s troublesome observation of missiological impact without true character change – especially regarding the issues of ethnocentrism – eventually launched Development Associates International, the ministry I now work with.²²

Yorubas and Ibo: in the first residency of this Doctor of Ministry program, Dr. Timothy Tennent alluded to a conversation with Yoruba Christians in Nigeria. When he asked, “Whom do you feel closer to – an

²¹ This theme will re-occur throughout the paper, and it also is a primary theme in Unit 10 of the course designed as a result of this research.

²² Amazingly, in spite of the fact that our organization was started in response to the Rwandan genocide, as of 2003, we had no leadership course, seminar, or workshop specifically designed to address this matter. This obvious lack has provoked not only this dissertation but more significantly the resultant course, “Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity,” which addresses the leader, his or her character, and issues of ethnic identity and ethnic reconciliation.

Ibo Christian or a Yoruba Muslim?”, the Yoruba Christians answered “Yoruba Muslim.” Hoping that Tim’s observation was untrue, I relayed Tim’s story to a group of Nigerian pastors (mostly Yorubas) in Ibadan, Nigeria in August 2002. I asked, “Is this true?” They answered yes, but went on to explain that those who answered this way might be nominal Christians. These leaders know something is wrong with the ethnic identity of these Christians, but when I pursued the matter further, I discovered that no one was directly addressing the problem.

Cultural Clashes Across Africa: an issue of *The Church Leader in Africa* focused on “African Culture Meets the Bible” and included articles like “The Clash of Cultures,” “African Culture at a Crossroad” and “Singing a New Song: Breaking Cultural Barriers to Authentic Worship.”²³ But the conspicuous absence of articles on the Gospel’s impact on nationalism or tribalism or ethnocentrism caused me to wonder if the authors were even scratching the surface. I found myself asking, “What resources are designed to help leaders understand that we are not just converted to Christ, and that we need to develop a Christ-like perspective on our own cultures, but also that we are converted to the multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic family of God?”

Black and White in New England: Stephen A. Macchia, then president of Vision New England, reminded readers of the racial divide of

²³ *The Church Leader in Africa* (Vol. 12, No. 3, 3rd quarter 2002).

the New England church in a September 2002 letter to the friends and partners of Vision New England. He wrote:

This month we hosted the Rev. Dr. Michael Haynes, senior pastor of the historic, prominent African American congregation, Twelfth Baptist Church in Roxbury, Massachusetts, where he has served for over 38 years. We were deeply moved and challenged by his life story and the significant ways in which God has used him to help shape the landscape of the black church in our region. His 76 years of life experience has spilled over into the hearts and lives of hundreds of leaders, including yours truly.

After hearing him speak for over an hour, I sought to wrap up his comments and the weaving of his insights into Seven Priorities for building bridges across regional, ethnic and racial boundaries that have separated us for decades. These priorities can be summed up as follows... relationships matter most of all; be better educated about one another 's histories and cultures; use mutually understandable terminology; express genuine empathy; take risks in developing ministry partnerships; spend time together to develop trust; and most of all, focus on the Book, the Blood and the Blessed Hope!²⁴

²⁴ Stephen A. Macchia, *Vision New England* newsletter, September 2002, 1.

I read this Vision New England report with great optimism about ethnic healing in our region, but I found myself wondering if and how these “Seven Priorities” can be implemented. Dr. Macchia’s suggestions were highly practical, but there was a notable lack of any reference to the theological foundations which build on the Scriptures rather than experiential learning.

Multi-Ethnic or Multiple Ethnic Churches? Around the same time, Emmanuel Gospel Center in Boston’s South End co-sponsored a “Multicultural Leadership Consultation” on November 9, 2002 in Boston. It featured 200 leaders from 16 people groups gathering to tell the story of “Boston’s Book of Acts” – “how the Kingdom of God is growing in Boston to the ends of the earth – through key Christian leaders from the various peoples of the world living right here in Boston.”²⁵ The report featured a variety of testimonies, but all of them were ethnic specific church plants. As I read this report, I found myself asking, Does the vision of Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 support a strategy of planting ethnic specific churches or does God want something more tangible, where the dividing walls have really been broken down in practical, daily, relational fellowship?

All of these influences launched my inquiry into a missiological approach for affirming the issues of ethnic identity, culture, and indigenous specificity and for combating ethnocentrism and the associated topics of

²⁵ *EGC Inside*, December 2002, Vol. 9, No. 12, 1.

racism and nationalism which lead to a divided church at best, and tragedies like the Rwandan genocide at worst.

In his book, *Conversion*, E. Stanley Jones tells of his experiences as an evangelist with a Christian community in India, where everyone, including the sweeper, enjoyed one day off each week. The sweeper's work included cleaning the latrines because this was before the days of flush toilets. Typically only the untouchables would touch a job like that. But, writes Jones, "We each volunteered. One day, I said to a Brahmin convert who was hesitating to volunteer, 'Brother C., when are you going to volunteer for latrine duty?' He shook his head slowly and said, 'Brother Stanley, I'm converted, but I'm not converted that far!'"²⁶

My search is designed to push our missiological thinking on just how far Jesus wants us be converted, what it means that he has destroyed the dividing walls of hostility, and created out of diverse humanity "one new humanity."²⁷

PROVOKING THE QUESTION

Development Associates International, the ministry with which my wife and I work, dedicates itself to leadership training across cultures. We currently work directly with "grassroots" leaders in India, Nigeria, Haiti, Belgium, Uganda, South Africa, Egypt and the Middle East, Sri Lanka, Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, Russia and more. Our training in the past five

²⁶ E. Stanley Jones, *Conversion* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1959), 57.

²⁷ Ephesians 2:14-22 will be a very significant passage in this dissertation.

years has taken us to work with Christian leaders in places like Colombia, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Zimbabwe, Thailand, China, Cambodia, the Philippines, Israel, Palestine and the West Bank, and Northern Ireland.

In this ministry of encouraging leaders to grow, we find a twofold tension evident in our cross-cultural ministry. On the one hand, we seek to demonstrate an appreciation and respect for all cultures and ethnicities. This means affirming ethnic identity, encouraging indigenization of any of our materials (“translatability”), and celebrating cultural practices that truly enhance the practice and implementation of locally relevant leadership.

On the other hand, we recognize the destructive potential of ethnocentricity. Our co-worker in Nigeria, a member of the Ibo people, suffered greatly as a prisoner-of-war during the ethnically motivated Biafran War. Our associate in India comes from a people group that has difficulty gaining respect from other “higher caste” peoples – even Christians. The leader of the ministry in Uganda was almost killed during the ethnic genocide attempts of Idi Amin. Co-workers in Sri Lanka have lost loved ones in the Tamil-Sinhalese violence. Students in our classes in the West Bank have suffered in prison because of ethnic oppression, and associates in Zimbabwe have had their lives reduced to chaos and chronic fear because of political leaders asserting their own tribe over all others. Dayton and Fraser articulate the challenge:

There is often a very real dilemma between the imperative for demonstrable unity based on reconciliation between separate

peoples and the imperative to respect the distinctive indigeneity of each unique people. The rich variety of culture should be preserved by the gospel, not destroyed. Yet the very preservation of it often gives continuing support to attitudes of superiority and exclusiveness that are incompatible with a discipleship that demands love and justice. The attempt to transcend cultural differences often leads to a non-indigenous, artificial church that loses its potency to evangelize the group from which it was derived. Each church, if it is to be truly indigenous, must be rooted in the soil of the local culture of its people.²⁸

Yet honoring indigeneity must be held in tension with the biblical mandate for unity in diversity, the many-cultured family of God, and the reality of the past hurt that cultures and individuals have inflicted on each other. No wonder Ajith Fernando observed as cited earlier, referring Jonah's hatred of the Ninevite people, "For some reason, ethnic hatred is one of the toughest areas for God to change."²⁹

All of these reflections and interactions with Christian leaders have provoked my thinking further about issues of race and ethnicity. Where does racial reconciliation and inter-ethnic peace-making fit in our ideas about "making disciples" or in developing Christian leaders?

²⁸ Edward R. Dayton and David A. Fraser, *Planning Strategies for World Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 130.

²⁹ Ajith Fernando, biblical exposition of Jonah 4 at the Urbana 87 conference, December 31, 1987.

We are convinced that Jesus' Commission sends us to make disciples of "all ethnicities," but we're not very clear on the implications for followers of Christ on the way we view the "Other" – especially if a believer has come from a context where ethnic division turns their world into “us” and “them.” Where do issues like ethnicity and nationality fit as they relate to my being a follower of Jesus Christ?

Asking these questions has given rise to three related questions to ponder.³⁰ If we desire to build towards that great multi-cultural, multi-ethnic worship service of Revelation 5:9 and 7:9, we must wrestle with these questions now.

What does it mean to be one new humanity (Ephesians 2)? At the theological foundation the relationship of leadership development and ethnicity lies this passage in Ephesians where Paul describes the church as the place where dividing walls are broken down in Christ, and God makes one new humanity out of two ethnically different, historically alienated people.

Jesus does not make us one homogenous unit; instead, he takes us in our diversity and makes a new kind of person out of us all. Chrysostom, famous preacher of the early Church, described it is as if one should melt down a statue of silver and a statue of lead, and the two should come out gold.

³⁰ Some of this material appeared in my article entitled, “Ethnicity and Discipleship: Three Questions on the Table” (*Pulse* (11/7/03)).

But such unity in diversity seems rare. Are most Christians only "partially converted" – like Jones' Brahmin? At the Lord's Table, do we all keep our eyes on the crucified Lord and fail to notice the "Other" kneeling beside us? Do ethnic specific ministries allow people to become a saved member of their ethnic specific group without dealing with their perspective on the "Other" – including old enemies? Do they never proceed to the point of seeing others who are different as fellow family members in God's household?

An inner city pastor working with converted gang members understood the issue. He required that these young Christians leave their "colors" (their gang identity) and their weapons at the altar before they could receive communion. It was a vivid picture of Christ's death making peace and creating a new family. How does this picture translate in other contexts?

How much does our leadership development need to wrestle with history? On a trip to Bosnia in 2003, our host explained that the Serbian aggression in 1989 towards the Muslims was related to an event in 1389 where many Serbs were slaughtered by Kosovan Muslims. Slobodan Milosevic used the 600th anniversary of the defeat of the Serbs by Muslims in Kosovo to ignite Serbian nationalism and aggression.³¹

As I heard this story, I thought to myself, "How can someone like me from the USA – whose entire national history is about one-third as long

³¹ From Milosevic's speech at the 600th anniversary of the Kosovo Polje battle of 1389 - http://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~bip/docs/kosovo_polje/kosovo_polje.html.

as this – teach a Serb to follow Jesus and love those he has been historically indoctrinated to hate? How does Christian discipleship help people deal with, in Donald Schriver's words, 'the leftover debris of their national pasts'?"³²

Many of us come from a cultural context where we think little about the past: witness how seldom we who are white in the USA want to deal with the lingering issues of slavery or racism or the "ethnic cleansing" of the First Nations Peoples centuries ago. Many of us are naïvely optimistic when it comes to ethnic relationships and cultural history – like Rodney King who wondered, "Why can't we all just get along?" But until we start wrestling with our respective and our collective histories, we will not really know how to address the historical hostilities we find elsewhere.

History as well can urge us to preach reconciliation with greater resolve. In light of the fantastic progress of Pentecostalism in the world, leaders should remember their own "roots" concerning the signs of the Holy Spirit. William Seymour, key figure in the Azusa Street revivals that birthed the modern Pentecostal movement, "came to believe that the truest sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit was not speaking in tongues but the demise of racial barriers between Christians."³³ History shows that the early Pentecostal movement did not follow Seymour's exhortation, and by 1914, the movement was splitting, largely over the issue of racial

³² Donald J. Schriver, Jr., *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 4.

³³ Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven* (New York: Addison-Wesley Press, 1995), 63.

segregation.³⁴ The sad historical lesson reminds us that in regards to ethnic and racial equality, the church often adapts the separatist attitudes of the culture rather than preaching and acting prophetically.

What is the role of remembering versus forgetting? In Mostar, Herzegovina, a sign is painted on the Muslim side of the city. It simply reads, "Don't forget." The older Muslims do not want the younger ones to forget the atrocities committed against them by Orthodox Serbs and later Catholic Croats in the conflicts of the late 1980's and early 1990's. But if there is no forgiveness and forgetting, the peace between peoples will be nothing more than "hatred that is sleeping."

Miroslav Volf, himself a Croat who suffered under Serbian aggression, tells his own story of remembering so as to forget in his book, *Exclusion and Embrace*. He tells how his own pilgrimage towards forgiveness was provoked by a question: "Can you embrace a *cetnik* [the violent Serbian aggressors who had sown desolation in Croatia and elsewhere]?"

Like Corrie Ten Boom's account of confronting the Nazi prison camp guard who was now a follower of Christ, Volf had to face the implications of giving grace to the ultimate evil "Other." It's the question that Sri Lankan Christians – Sinhalese and Tamils – face as a 20+ year civil war re-emerges. Followers of Christ who are Jews and Arabs, Kurds

³⁴ See <http://members.aol.com/revepete/HolinessCh11.html> as well as Vinson Synan, "Missionaries of the One-Way Ticket," *Azusa Street and Beyond: 100 Years of Commentary on the Global Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement*, Grant McClung, ed. (Orlando, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2006), 41-52.

and Iraqis, Yoruba, Ibo, and Hausa, Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, and all who make up the USA must learn to ask for and receive forgiveness if there's any hope of racial unity and building the new household of God. Desmond Tutu's book title has it right: we have no future without forgiveness.³⁵

What does this reconciled fellowship look like? Is it the young Armenian Christian woman reaching out in Ismir to share the Gospel with the descendants of the Turkish Muslims who persecuted her grandparents in that same city? Is it the Christians of South India deferring to the leadership of those in the North? Will it be like the church in Toronto where congregants from 43 different African nations – some of whom are historical enemies – worshipping together under the Lordship of Christ? Or how about the mission agency in Nigeria where the staff's unity in diversity is reflected by the fact that the mother tongues of the staff included four primary languages and eleven other local languages?

The local expressions may vary widely, but it always involves diverse, repentant people becoming a new family under Christ.

THE DIMENSIONS OF THE QUESTION

So then, what does God want when it comes to ethnic diversity and ecclesiological unity? Where does ethnicity fit into the profile of being a follower of Jesus Christ? And where does ethnic identity derail and

³⁵ Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

deteriorate into destructive ethnocentrism? In short, what does it mean to be united in Christ yet diverse in culture?

From the viewpoint of the practitioner, we need also to ask what is the end result of this research. A host of theological truths combined with a myriad of quotations from experts will not necessarily help my co-workers in Nigeria who are leading their ministry through an ethnically diverse team. My co-worker in India working within the incredible ethnic diversity of that caste-divided country will not be helped by my extensive bibliography.

We believe that – in the process of Christian leadership development – we need to affirm ethnic identity and the God-given gift of culture, yet we know that we also need to combat the destructive tendencies of ethnocentrism. All of this brings us to our question:

How can we develop leaders who are serving in multiple cultural contexts so that they understand a biblical theology of ethnicity and culture which will simultaneously help them to understand the value of ethnicity and culture yet also embrace the multi-cultural new humanity which Jesus died to create so that these leaders can also speak against ethnocentricity, work for reconciliation, and serve as biblical peace-makers?

Contemporary missiology recognizes the need to address this subject, but the issue has not been addressed clearly – at least at a level which is accessible to the “grassroots” pastors and leaders who serve

throughout the Majority World. How do we affirm the God-given distinctions of ethnic and cultural identity and yet rebuke ethnocentrism and the human tendency to assert superiority over others? Put another way, how do we build a body of believers where all can celebrate our sense of ethnicity – “Who I am” – yet defeat the exclusivistic tendency towards ethnocentrism – “Who I am not” [or “who I am at the expense of another”]?

The underlying theological investigation of this paper and subsequent research will confront the issues of:

IDENTITY: what does it mean to be “in Christ” and part of the new community in relationship to God-created ethnic diversity and particularity?

FORGIVENESS: how do we reconcile people historically divided and conditioned to hate each other? What does the new community mean given multiple offenses and historical pain caused by those who are “Other”? Or, to put it in a New Testament analogy, how does the church in Jerusalem welcome people like Paul the apostle (given his violent actions against them) or peoples like the Samaritans (given the historical Jewish-Samaritan animosity)?

RECONCILIATION: how do we move believers from the highly Western individualistic model of conversion, which focuses on the vertical relationship, to a more biblical model of conversion – which features reconciliation vertically to God through Christ and horizontally to each

other through Christ because Christ has destroyed the dividing walls of hostility?

APPLICATION: on a practical level of the local church or a mission organization, what does becoming a new household, and a new humanity look like?³⁶

My investigation of this question of ethnicity versus ethnocentrism issue tackles a wide spectrum:

The question is historical. The tensions here are not new. The Bible, especially the Gospels and Acts, challenges the ethnocentricity of its Jewish readers with multiple references to Gentiles and Samaritans. Jonah in the Old Testament and Peter in Acts 10 offer glimpses of people who wanted their own ethnic God and God intervened to rebuke their bitterness, stereotypes, and ethnocentricity

Church history into the book of Acts and beyond confronts the same problem. Kenneth Scott LaTourette cites one example in the early years of the church when he implies that the Donatist controversy (331-316 and following years) may have been racially motivated:

A number of factors combined to give the Donatists an extensive following in North Africa. It may have been that they were largely drawn from the non-Latin and the Catholics from the Latin elements

³⁶ See Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (New York: Friendship Press, 1954).

in the population, and that the cleavage was in part racial and cultural.³⁷

Recent history in the last 100 years likewise highlights the problem. Nazism, Fascism, Racism, and Communism have affected the church and challenged our endorsement of diverse peoples and our rejection of ethnocentric ideologies. The Apartheid regime has been both a blight on the record of the Church and a testimony of the church's ability to recover from mistakes, repent, and build towards reconciliation. But the challenge remains – whether the church is seeking to challenge Apartheid, speak healing to the Tutsis and Hutus, or negotiate peace in the Balkans: what does a church that is still primarily mono-ethnic and mono-cultural in its local expression have to say to the ethnic issues and divides in our world?

Stephen Rhodes takes the historical problem and brings it up to date in the United States of America today. He writes, "If the truth be told, most Christian congregations are still homogeneous and ethnocentric. The staggering diversity being embraced by the postmodern world overwhelms our theological senses."³⁸

Ethnic division is not new and often addresses ethnic divides that have been festering for generations. Investigating back into the interaction of mission's history and colonial history reveals some very uncomfortable

³⁷ Kenneth Scott LaTourette, *A History of Christianity: Volume I* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1975), 139.

³⁸ Stephen A. Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet: The Church in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1998), 12.

realities regarding race and ethnicity. Kwame Bediako points out that the primary exposure of Europeans to Africans before 1800 was in the context of slavery:

Together with theories of racial hierarchy and a chain of being elaborated to explain social, cultural, and economic diversities between the different groupings of mankind perceived as races, this image insured that consistently the Negro was relegated to the bottom of the scale.³⁹

Bediako goes on to show that missionaries coming from Europe, no matter how benevolent they were, often came with the same attitudes; some of the missionaries treated Africa and Africans as “savage, ignorant, and superstitious.”⁴⁰ To address this topic honestly, we must confront the fact that many of our Western missionary “heroes” of the Great Century in missions probably held views of Africans that today we would consider at best pejorative and at worst, racist.

The question is anthropological and sociological. As we wrestle with how we view ourselves and how we define ourselves as against the “Other,” we are addressing a topic that will transform both the way we see ourselves and the way we view others. As a result, we will delve into inter-personal relationships in the Body of Christ that are truly counter-

³⁹ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 6.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

cultural. The new humanity of the church will set it apart from a world of cultures defined by separation and hostility towards each other.

The question is soteriological and missiological. Does “accepting Jesus” mean also accepting the “Other” whom Jesus loves? In other words, is our highly individualistic Western vertical perspective on salvation, where salvation is seen primarily as an individual coming into a one-on-one relationship with God, woefully inadequate? Is there a horizontal aspect of salvation too, where salvation is not merely accepting Christ but also accepting the people whom Christ accepts, no matter how different that person might be from me?

If so, is a person with the racial hatred of someone like Jonah showing that he or she has not truly understood the grace of God in his/her own life? Cross-cultural workers have gone ahead of us believing that God loved the “Others” that they were trying to reach, but did they communicate that becoming part of Christ’s family required them to change the way that they viewed “Others” – especially their historical enemies? Did they teach people to look upward to Christ for salvation without teaching them to look sideways to realize that being reconciled to God means being reconciled to others?

Since the Lausanne conference in 1974, the mission world has been seen in terms of ethnic specific peoples. We now examine “people groups.” The “nations” of Matthew 28:18-20 are seen in terms of *ethne*

and no longer as geo-politically bounded nations.⁴¹ But affirming ethnicity is useless in a world of ethnic hatred. Billy Graham stated the issue dramatically:

Racial and ethnic hostility is the foremost social problem facing our world today. . . Racism – in the world and in the church – is one of the greatest barriers to world evangelization. Racial and ethnic hatred is a sin and we need to label it as such.⁴²

In his article, “Jihad vs. McWorld,” Benjamin Barber paints a very bleak picture of the impact of religion in general and the monotheistic religions in specific on what he calls ethnic “jihadis:”

Whatever forms of Enlightenment universalism might once have come to grace such historically related forms of monotheism as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, in many of their modern incarnations they are parochial rather than cosmopolitan, angry rather than loving, proselytizing rather than ecumenical, zealous rather than rationalist, sectarian rather than deistic, ethnocentric

⁴¹ An example of this is the work of the Wycliffe Bible Translators. They underscore the need to cross cultures in an effort to bring people the Gospel. The Wycliffe Bible Translators’ *“Ethnologue”* (Dallas: SIL, 1984), xv) lists 5445 living languages in the world, with 723 definite needs for translation, 66 needs for biblical translation/revisions, and 2330 “probable needs.” The global challenge? To cross cultures in an effort to translate the message into culturally relevant, ethnically contextualized terms.

⁴² Quoted in Norman Anthony Peart, *Separate No More: Understanding and Developing Racial Reconciliation in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 81. Even the secular media has identified the negative impact of ethnocentrism. Arthur Schlesinger quotes *The Economist* concerning the destructive powers of ethnocentricity: “The virus of tribalism... risks becoming the AIDS of international politics – lying dormant for years, and then flaring up to destroy countries.” Arthur Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 11.

rather than universalizing. As a result, like the new forms of hypernationalism, the new expressions of religious fundamentalism are fractious and pulverizing, never integrating.⁴³

Samuel Huntington similarly writes about the impact of ethnocentricity in directing our world. Huntington's main thesis is straightforward: "In the post-Cold War world," he writes, "the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural."⁴⁴

He goes on to note that in this new world order, "the most pervasive, important and dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich and poor, or other economically defined groups, but between peoples belonging to different cultural entities."⁴⁵

Later in the book, he predicts the tensions that ethnic separations will create:

Spurred by modernization, global politics is being reconfigured along cultural lines. Peoples and countries with similar cultures are coming together. Peoples and countries with different cultures are coming apart. Alignments defined by ideology and superpower relations are giving way to alignments defined by culture and

⁴³ Benjamin R. Barber, "Jihad vs. McWorld" (*Atlantic Monthly*, March 1992), 56.

⁴⁴ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 21.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

civilization. Political boundaries increasingly are redrawn to coincide with cultural ones: ethnic, religious, and civilizational.⁴⁶

The question is ecclesiological and eschatological. The need to affirm diversity and combat ethnocentricity is not an issue affecting uniquely the operations of the United Nations or global mission agencies like the Wycliffe Bible Translators or World Vision International. It affects us all; it is an issue of the local church. Spawned largely by the migrations of peoples and the growth of mega-cities, most of us are living in places being affected by multicultural influences.

For every pastor or church leader – or Christian organizational leader working in a multi-cultural context – the question becomes how to achieve the goal articulated by Stephen Rhodes as the “sacred synthesis of unity and diversity.”⁴⁷ Following the same line of thinking, Tim Dearborn of World Vision, addressing “*The Local Church in a Global Era*” observes that learning intentional diversity is one of the greatest challenges facing the local congregation:

The Spirit of God is stirring local congregations to embrace the diverse world that God has brought to it, demonstrating the quality of community for which all humankind hungers. ***In fact, the***

⁴⁶ Ibid., 125.

⁴⁷ Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet*, 20.

church will have global credibility only to the extent that it has local diversity (emphasis mine).⁴⁸

Hauerwas and Willimon expand the goal further by drawing attention to the church's prophetic role in combating tribalism:

The church is the one political entity in our culture that is transnational, transcultural. Tribalism is not the church determined to serve God rather than Caesar. Tribalism is the United States of America, which sets up artificial boundaries and defends them with murderous intensity. And the tribalism of nations occurs most viciously in the absence of the church able to say and to show, in its life together, that God, not the nations, rules the world.⁴⁹

James Eckman similarly challenges the vision of the church:

Whatever race or ethnic background, all need Jesus Christ and all bear His image. The Church has the radical solution to society's struggle with racial and ethnic differences. It is a supernatural solution: Disciples of Jesus Christ who have experienced His salvation and who love one another with the supernatural love of their Savior. The entire world needs to see this radical solution lived out in the Church.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Max Stackhouse, Tim Dearborn, and Scott Paeth, eds., *The Local Church in a Global Era: Reflections for a New Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 213.

⁴⁹ Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 42-43.

⁵⁰ James Eckman, "The Ethics of Race", *Christian Ethics in a Postmodern World* (Evangelical Training Association, Wheaton IL, 1999), 72.

The cultural diversity that church leaders are facing on a local level has forced many to recognize that, “Multicultural congregations bear witness, as Christ commanded us, to the reign of God and God’s intentions for creation.”⁵¹

Stan Gaede paints this vivid picture of the diverse Body of Christ: When we think of the church we must conjure up a picture not of people like ourselves, but of people of all colors and shapes and ages, women and, men speaking different tongues, following different customs, practicing different habits, but all worshipping the same Lord.⁵²

Some have observed that reconciliation and discipleship go together as the church’s mission in the world. As cited earlier, Harvey Cox’s overview of the history of the Pentecostal movement points out that William Seymour, key figure in the Azusa Street revivals believed that the greatest sign of the Holy Spirit’s fullness was not speaking in tongues but rather racial reconciliation. “Only when this evidence is fully present, Seymour believed, will we know that the New Jerusalem is about to draw near.”⁵³

Eckman continues this theme:

⁵¹ Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet*, 77.

⁵² Stan Gaede, *When Tolerance is No Virtue* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 63.

⁵³ Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 63.

The church of Jesus Christ should therefore model the supernatural impartiality that refuses to discriminate. The Church should model reconciliation of all races and ethnic groups. It should cut the radical path for all of society, for it alone sees people the way God sees them.⁵⁴

Norman Peart expands the interpersonal reconciliation component of developing followers of Christ when he writes:

Reconciliation that transcends social divisions is presented in Scripture as God's desire, not in competition with spiritual reconciliation but as a reality that is dependent on a person's first being reconciled to God through Christ. The greatest dividers of humanity (race, gender, class, nationality) are then made inconsequential by the greatest uniter of humanity – Christ.⁵⁵

And even if we can reach some sort of unified diversity in our local congregations, what are the already/not yet tensions in all this? Is God's heavenly goal homogeneity? Obviously not, but if there is united particularity in heaven, how does this get reproduced in Christians and in the church as we are still "on the way?" In the words of J. Daniel Hays, "We in the Church today need to ask ourselves the question as to why our

⁵⁴ Eckman, "The Ethics of Race," 75.

⁵⁵ Peart, *Separate No More*, 107.

earthly churches differ so much in composition from the congregations depicted in Revelation?”⁵⁶

The question is theological. The bulk of this paper will concentrate here. How does being created in the image of God affect the way we view ourselves and others? What is the impact of the Fall? How does God’s desire for the nations, the reconciling work of Christ, and the multi-cultural vision of heaven affect the conclusions we will draw? The theological exploration requires that we wrestle with the biblically supported tension of being “one in Christ”⁵⁷ versus celebrating our diversity.⁵⁸

Exploring ethnocentricity will also force us to realize how localized our theological perspectives are. We in the West often refer to our theology as “theology” and everyone else’s as indigenous and local (Asian-theology, Latin American-theology, Black-theology, etc.) – as if our way of doing theology is normative and everyone else’s is limited.

Wrestling with the issues of ethnicity, ethnocentricity, and unity-in-diversity will force us to enlarge our theological view into what has been called “glocal” (global *and* local).⁵⁹ A globalized theology will enlarge our

⁵⁶ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 199.

⁵⁷ John 17; Ephesians 2

⁵⁸ Acts 15; Revelation 5:9; 7:9.

⁵⁹ The word “glocal” is usually attributed to Kenichi Ohmae, *The Borderless World* (New York: Harper, 1990), 187.

understanding of the Gospel, but it will also challenge our localized theological assumptions.⁶⁰

In developing leaders, we are looking at personal and community transformation. Our theological foundation establishes the biblical teaching on how a follower of Jesus Christ needs to be transformed in his/her view of self and others. Thus, the heart of this paper will concentrate here.

⁶⁰ Three examples of this pursuit of glocal theologizing are Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, eds., *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, May 1997); and Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

CHAPTER 2: FROM CREATION TO THE NATIONS

In the pages that follow, I will present a Genesis-through-Revelation examination of issues related to human identity and ethnic or cultural specificity. As we examine various texts, I will be asking throughout, “What do these passages have to teach us about people who are “in Christ” and yet created in ethnic diversity?”

In my research through the Scriptures, I have identified seven theological issues that I consider foundational for our understanding and the understanding of the leaders we train of the ethnicity/ ethnocentrism issue. In Chapter 2, I examine **first** the doctrine of Creation in establishing our identity and human worth, followed **second** by the impact of the Fall in creating the foundation of ethnocentrism – people finding their own identity at the expense of another. **Third**, I explore God’s redemptive plan for all nations.

In Chapter 3, I continue to explore this redemptive plan as it culminates, **fourth**, in the reconciling death of Christ on the cross, breaking down divisions, creating **fifth**, a new humanity, the household of God. I conclude by evaluating what the Biblical teaching about united diversity means **sixth** for our Kingdom mission, and **finally** for our long-term sense of eschatological hope. At the conclusion of Chapter 3, I summarize the biblical overview and then move to some contemporary theological issues that deeply affect our missiology – the “Three Self”

movement, the Homogeneous Unit Principle, and the issue of globalization.

Throughout this paper, I have drawn heavily from J. Daniel Hays' book, *From Every People and Nation*⁶¹ which I found to be very helpful but at times theologically cumbersome – especially related to the audience for whom I will be writing. While his research is extremely valuable for addressing American Black-White relationships, his concentration on this specific issue sometimes misses the biblical principles needed to address the more generic “my people/your people” foundational issues for all inter-cultural relationships.⁶²

Though this dissertation is not a historical examination specifically, I will make allusion to historical examples where appropriate, especially as they pertain to the way specific scriptures might have been interpreted in specific contexts. As a historical overview, however, it should be noted that my research has convinced me that Andrew Walls and others are correct: we are at a **unique** “Ephesian moment” in church history. The “multiple centers of universality”⁶³ in the church around the world forces us to deal with the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural church as never before. Walls observes:

⁶¹ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*.

⁶² Hays' subtitle, “A Biblical Theology of Race” is a little misleading; it should be “A Biblical Theology of Black-White Relations.” He focuses heavily on the inclusion of black Africans throughout the Scripture.

⁶³ Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 69.

But in our day the Ephesian moment has come again, and come in a richer mode than has ever happened since the first century.

Developments over several centuries, reaching a climax in the twentieth, mean that we no longer have two, but innumerable, major cultures in the church.⁶⁴

Lamin Sanneh illustrates Walls' point: "... Christianity is the religion of over two thousand different language groups in the world. More people pray and worship in more languages in Christianity than in any other religion in the world."⁶⁵

Sierre Leonean historian Jehu Hanciles connects the "Great Century" of missions expansion to the sovereign act of God in historical migrations of peoples from every nation to every nation. Writing specifically about Europeans, Hanciles observes, "From 1815 to 1914, the great century of Western missionary enterprise, up to 60 million Europeans left for the Americas, Oceania, and East and South Africa. It is hardly an accident of history that the greatest Christian missionary expansion of all time coincided with possibly the most remarkable of all migrations in human history, culminating in an epochal transformation of global Christianity."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Walls, "Ephesian Moment," 78

⁶⁵ Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?*, 69.

⁶⁶ Jehu Hanciles, "Migration and Mission: Some Implications for the Twenty-First Century Church", *International Bulletin of Mission Research* (October 2003), 149.

The migrations of peoples and the globalization of Christianity has put us at the unique moment in history where the body of Christ can – for the first time since the book of Acts – be the shalom-based, Spirit-filled, diverse yet united household of God. In this era of truly global Christianity, we have the potential of foreshadowing the worship service described in Revelation 7:9.

CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

“Racism or the presupposition that one’s own race is superior or better than another is a denial that all people have been created in the image of God.”⁶⁷ Indeed, the Bible affirms that every human being is created in the image of God – equally, beautifully, and uniquely. The biblical teaching of the *imago Dei* in our fellow humans means that we must view every other person as an equal, an eternal soul, a fellow dependent on the hand of God. To despise the “Other” – regardless of our myriad cultural or ethnic differences – is to despise our Creator.⁶⁸ This is why Jesus spoke in the Sermon on the Mount with such vehement judgment on those who would call another person “Raca” or “fool” or

⁶⁷ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 50.

⁶⁸ C.S. Lewis writes, “It is a serious thing... that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealing with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics... It is immortals whom we joke with, marry, snub, exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.” (C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 14-15.

“worthless.”⁶⁹ The words are not simply socially offensive; they reduce the “Other” to something less than a person valued by God.

When the Bible affirms that God created humankind, it provides us with a sense of worth and identity. We belong to God. We are created in the image of God. Our identity derives from our Father. We are all family because “from one man he made every nation of men.”⁷⁰ He creates and sustains our lives: in him we live and move and have our being.⁷¹

The foundation of being created in the image of God attacks at its core our human propensity towards superiority, favoritism, partiality, and racism. Before the Creator, we are equally valuable, equally loved, equally beautiful. John Stott roots his teaching on respect for ethnic diversity and commitment to human rights in the doctrine of creation. He writes:

The origin of human rights is creation. Man has never “acquired” them. Nor has any government or other authority conferred them. Man has had them from the beginning. He received with his life from the hand of his Maker. They are inherent in his creation. They have been bestowed on him by his Creator.⁷²

⁶⁹ Matthew 5:22.

⁷⁰ Acts 17:26. In the Old Testament there is a clear affirmation of the unity of humankind from the one set of parents and one act of creation. Paul’s assertion of our common origins probably shocked the Athenians because they believed themselves to be a separate, unique, superior race.

⁷¹ Acts 17:28.

⁷² John Stott, *Involvement: Volume 1: Being a Responsible Christian in a Non-Christian Society* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1985), 195.

The doctrine of creation carries over into our understanding of diversity within humankind, because God as Creator also affirms that God has created culture – the unique human expressions of external things like music, language, traditions, and food and internal things like relational or decision-making styles. This diversity, however, is never intended to be a justification for separation and superior posturing; instead, like the 9000 species of birds and thousands of species of flowers, insects, and animals, our cultural diversity should be seen as reflections of God's created glory manifested in various forms. Hays underscores our common ground of being created in the image of God when he writes, "All people are created in the image of God, and therefore all races and ethnic groups have the same status and unique value that results from the image of God."⁷³

Sanneh connects creation of each person with diverse cultures (especially as "culture" is defined linguistically) as our foundation for mission to all peoples:

Human beings are made in the image of God, and Jesus in his defining Jewishness is the archetype of humanity's imperishable divine potential, the cosmic symbol of what God has for us. History is impregnated with the spirit of ethnic authentication, and the gospel compels us to reimagine humanity in the specificity of God's reconciling work, to the end that humanity, nurtured in its

⁷³ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 202.

fundamental mother tongue idiom, may experience a new birth to life, to the end that all God's children may have a second chance.⁷⁴

Creation as the Basis for Human Rights

Humanity in its diversity (and fallen condition) inevitably uses our differences as a reason for separation. We compare (with the usual intent of self-exaltation) culture against culture, riches against poverty, male against female, educated against uneducated. The doctrine of creation undercuts these comparisons and forces us to remember that we all derive from one Creator.

In the book of Proverbs, the writer affirms that oppressing of the poor is contempt towards the Creator, while kindness to the poor honors God.⁷⁵ Proverbs 17:5 similarly affirms that “he who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker.” Comparisons and judgments against those who are different show contempt or defiance towards our common Creator.

Even the secular world realizes the need to affirm the value of every human individual as the basis for human rights. In The *U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the very foundation (the first statement in the Preamble) is the “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all the members of the human family” as the “foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.” Article 1 goes on

⁷⁴ Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?* 73.

⁷⁵ Proverbs 14:31.

to assert that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”⁷⁶

The authors of this Declaration do not provide any basis for this “inherent dignity” other than common humanity; without the doctrine of creation, their assumption is open to debate.

Post-modernity and the societal departure from a biblical sense of creation have laid a foundation for the decline of the human sense of identity and the corresponding protection of human rights. Dick Keyes observes:

The high view of humanity as the image of God has not survived the subtraction of God... Without a transcendent point of reference, something truly beyond our identity, we ourselves shrink... The human attempt to manufacture an identity apart from God has failed.⁷⁷

Following on this line of thinking, Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra observe, “The death of God does not, as Nietzsche believed, lead to the glorification of man; but, rather takes from men and women any claim they may have to be treated with reverence by their fellows.”⁷⁸

⁷⁶ <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>.

⁷⁷ Dick Keyes, *Beyond Identity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 12, 16, 24.

⁷⁸ Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 38.

They continue, documenting the need for the doctrine of creation as the foundation of human rights and inter-personal relationships:

What finally makes a society worth living in is not the amount of consumer goods available in shopping malls, nor the effectiveness of its social-welfare schemes, nor even the lack of discrimination in employment and education, but the sense all people should have of being valued and appreciated by their neighbors. The biblical understanding of the *imago Dei* restores the language of “human rights” to its proper anchoring in a larger framework of our mutual responsibility for one another before God. Where rights are regarded as purely formal, legal entities – disembedded from practices that affirm the relational nature of our human personhood – the public sphere of civil society withers. We are reduced to a set of mutually antagonistic groups, each asserting its rights against the other.⁷⁹

Missiological Implications of IMAGO DEI

It is worth noting two significant missiological implications of the foundational understanding of the *imago Dei*. First, this doctrine will set the church apart as totally counter-cultural in cultures dominated by other religions and worldviews which do not affirm the value of each individual. Vinoth Ramachandra, writing from his own context of Civil War-torn Sri

⁷⁹ Ibid., 41.

Lanka, dominated by Buddhist and Hindu worldviews, observes, “There are serious doubts whether a vision of human rights can be argued for coherently and sustained effectively in societies which lack an appropriate theological understanding of the human person.”⁸⁰ He goes on, “It is doubtful whether respect for all human beings can flourish in societies untouched by the biblical vision.”⁸¹

Second, the biblical understanding that every individual is created in the image of God provides the Christian imperative for caring for those that society rejects – even the “least of these.” Peskett and Ramachandra document that the morality of killing deformed or sickly newborns was not even questioned until the birth of the Christian church. Then they quote medical doctor Darrell Amundsen whose research on the care of defective children in the ancient world revealed that: “The first espousal of an idea of inherent human value in Western civilization depended on a belief that every human being was formed in the image of God.”⁸²

Creation and Identity

The doctrine of creation, therefore, affects how we view ourselves. This is essential because in interpersonal relationships – especially across cultures and across wide ranges of diversity – we need a secure sense of our own identity so that we have freedom to relate to the “Other.” If we

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 42.

⁸² Ibid.

ourselves are insecure, our identity is defined by external sources rather than based on our sense of being created in the image of God.

The doctrine of creation also affects the way we view others. If we see them as created in the image of God, we are forced to realize that they have equal worth before God. All foundations for racism, ethnocentrism, and partiality are destroyed.

Commenting on the creation account in Genesis 1 through 3, Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra observe:

Human personhood is constituted by relationality. Just as God relates to us and at the same time remains other than us, so within the human community we are related in diversity.... we do not find our fulfillment as persons apart from God and one another. Thus, the "Other," far from being a threat to my unique identity, is the one without whom I would have no identity. ***It is this fact of personhood, established by creation, that confers dignity and value to every human being.***⁸³

In summary: all people are created in the image of God, and our internal security and identity should be found in that relationship, thus enabling us to identify and relate to others.

⁸³ Ibid., 38.

IDENTITY AT THE EXPENSE OF THE “OTHER”

“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”⁸⁴

Adam and Eve’s choice to sin broke multiple relationships – humanity with God, humanity with nature, humanity with each other, and human beings with themselves. The Fall led to the human loss of identity (or at least the loss of our security in our identity) and created the relational environment where we need to start establishing ourselves against the “Other.” The Fall disconnects us with our Creator, so we enter into the world with a need to define our own identity, which we often do at the expense of another.

The most significant effect of the Fall is seen in the impact of the sin on a variety of relationships. First, Adam and Eve experience shame (nakedness) in their relationship. Then they look for ways to cover themselves, a foreshadowing of the human (inadequate) endeavor for self-sufficiency. Then, when they are “caught” in their sin, God confronts them. Blaming exacerbates the relational breakdown: Adam blames Eve and God, and Eve blames the snake.

The Fall sets in motion the human tendency to establish our identity at the expense of another. This propensity towards finding our identity at the expense of the “Other” is at the root of destructive ethnocentrism (and

⁸⁴ Genesis 3:7.

all other “isms” (racism, sexism, classism, etc). Sin has marred our identity so that we no longer have the security of our relationship with God. As a result, we relate in destructive ways towards each other, laying the foundations for pride, superiority, and oppression of the “Other.”

It was this “identity-at-the-expense-of-another” that Jesus was rebuking when he told the parable of the praying Pharisee versus the repentant tax collector.⁸⁵ Luke even identifies the attending religious leaders as those who were “confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else.” The Pharisee prayed with a sense of superior identity, thanking God for all the people he was NOT like – robbers, evildoers, adulterers, and the lowly tax collector nearby. His oppositional identity was at the expense of others, and his sense of superiority illustrated the impact of the Fall on relationships. Only when we, like the humble tax collector, reestablish our sense of identity based on the mercy of God and our belonging to God through Christ, do we begin the process of being freed from this tendency.

Thus, creation in all its diversity provides us with the basis of a healthy sense of our ethnic identity, but the Fall corrupts this identity and diversity deteriorates into competition, comparison, or oppression of the “Other.” Our ethnic distinctiveness reflects God’s creative diversity communicated through people and cultures. It also gives us a place to belong, to feel secure because we identify with our people and our specific

⁸⁵ Luke 18:9-14.

history, customs, and traditions. Without this sense of ethnic “family,” we can suffer from anomie (rootlessness) which can, according to Kirk, lead to “a crisis of selfhood and eventually to personality disorders.”⁸⁶

Ethnicity taken to an exclusivistic extreme, however, can lead to vigorous tribalism and even genocidal desires as one’s oppositional ethnic identity entails hostility to others. This is where ethnicity degenerates into ethnocentrism, leading to racism, prejudice, expressions of cultural superiority and genocidal desires for racial purity. Kirk observes that “This can become pathological, if the main way we affirm our own self is by despising others or rejecting their right to be different.”⁸⁷

What About Noah’s Curse on Ham and Canaan?

In a seminar several years ago at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, Dr. Tite Tienou made the shocking observation that Western missionaries were, as late as the early 1900’s, still evaluating whether or not Africans had full souls?⁸⁸ Their debate was based on the so-called “curse of Ham.”

⁸⁶ J. Andrew Kirk, *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 78.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ This concept factored into the earliest legislation of the United States when those who drafted the Constitution instituted the so-called “Three-fifths Compromise” in which a black man was considered three-fifths human for the purposes of determining representation of the Southern States in Congress. As a result, people could say that “all men were created equal” and rationalize away slavery by simply concluding that a black man was not fully human. The same logic was applied to giving rights to women – who were not legally persons but were rather the property of their husbands. See Paula Rothenberg, “How It Happened: Race and Gender Issues in U.S. Law,” in *Race, Class,*

The impact of the Fall and a journey into the book of Genesis requires us to address the question of Noah's curse on Ham and his son, Canaan, in Genesis 9: 20-27. This passage, misunderstood and misapplied accordingly was used to justify the enslavement of the black race in Europe and the colonies, including the United States, after 1619. Since some of Ham's descendants populated Africa, Noah's curse (some conclude) must therefore apply to all those who are from Africa. Many in the southern part of the United States prior to the Civil War used this argument to justify racial slavery. Unfortunately, in some circles, this perception about Noah's curse remains today.⁸⁹

Eckman evaluates the text and concludes, "It is simply impossible to see any justification for slavery or any other aspect of inferiority from the curse on Canaan. It is a gross distortion of God's Word to do so."⁹⁰ J. Daniel Hays complements Eckman's explanation. He argues that the curse on Canaan should be interpreted in its historical context as a

and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study, ed. Paula Rothenberg, 2nd ed., (New York: St. Martins, 1992), 239, 264.

For a full examination of the horrific ways that considering Africans as less than human played itself out, see Bernth Lindfors, ed., *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999).

⁸⁹ For a detailed examination of this historical reality, see Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁹⁰ Eckman, "The Ethics of Race," 74-75.

reference to the later defeat of the Canaanites by Israel upon entering the Promised Land – and nothing in relationship to the peoples of Africa.⁹¹

Though there seems to be no biblical justification for linking Noah's curse on the contemporary inhabitants of Africa, it illustrates two things about the impact of the Fall on human relationships. First, it illustrates generally the human tendency to exalt ourselves at the expense of others who are different than ourselves – especially if such exaltation allows us greater power over them. And second, it illustrates specifically the historical “baggage” that exists in the world in which we live. Being reconciled in human relationships – in this case Blacks and Whites – will require repentance and forgiveness between long separated peoples.

What Does the Tower of Babel Teach Us About Diversity?

In the section above about humankind being created in the image of God, I asserted that the diversity of cultures was part of this image – before sin entered the world. But what about the Tower of Babel and the forced spreading of peoples and the corresponding confusion of their languages? It is easy to read the biblical account of the Table of the Nations followed by the Tower of Babel and conclude that diversity was a punishment rather than the creative intent of God. So, before moving on to the global plan of God as demonstrated by his covenant with Abram, we must evaluate the diversity created by God at the Tower of Babel.

⁹¹ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 56.

Why does God curse people for trying to establish a unified culture? Is cultural distinctiveness a curse? Are the 5445 living languages in the world⁹² a result of our fallenness?

In contrast, Rhodes asserts that the problem of the Tower of Babel resulted from people desiring a unity against God's intended diversity. God designed diversity – "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (the so-called cultural mandate) – but humans, "rejecting the pluriform nature of creation that God has willed, the people impose a self-styled unity"⁹³ resulting in God's wrath.

Rhodes sees the attempt at cultural unity as an expressed rebellion against God: "Afraid of once again being separated and differentiated from one another, humanity presents God with a common front and a unifying purpose – self-preservation on their own terms."⁹⁴

Languages and cultures therefore are God's gifts to address the pride and violence of human culture. The scattering of the people and confusion of the languages guarantees that no one language or culture becomes exclusive and dominant. In order to experience all of God's gifts for humanity, we must realize that these gifts are received and refracted through different cultures. Cooperating together, each culture serves another through mutual correction, accountability and dependence and so reflect God's purpose for humanity.

⁹² *Ethnologue*, xv.

⁹³ Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet*, 25.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

However, the fallen creatures in fallen cultures continue to seek exclusiveness, where ethnic identity and culture distinctiveness becomes an excluding mechanism. This desire to exalt ourselves over others leads interpersonally to prejudice, bias, discrimination, and stereotyping. On a wider level, however, it leads to oppression, violence, ethnic cleansing and holocausts.

If God was dispersing the people for their desire to pursue self-made independence and unity apart from God, what is our basis for “united diversity” in the Church? Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggeman, commenting on the Tower of Babel, cites two types of unity. One type, he asserts, is the unity willed by God that all humanity be in covenant relationship with him.⁹⁵ In contrast, the unity suggested by the Tower of Babel is a unity “sought by fearful humanity organized against the purposes of God. This unity attempts to establish a cultural, human oneness without reference to the threats, promises, or mandates of God. This is a self-made unity in which humanity has a ‘fortress mentality.’ It seeks to survive by its own resources.”⁹⁶

The judgment of God on the people at the Tower of Babel, therefore, is God’s endorsement of diversity. Rather than allowing them to establish unity on their own terms, God sends them out with linguistic diversity to fulfill his mandate to multiply and fill the earth. Rhodes concludes: “God, the heavenly parent, whose children have been put on

⁹⁵ See Genesis 9:8-11.

⁹⁶ Walter Brueggeman, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 99-100.

their own, grown afraid, and tried to come home, now must push them back into the world.”⁹⁷ And this is exactly what God will do with Abram in Genesis 12.

The beneficiaries of the promise to Abram to “bless all nations” are the very nations created by the dispersion of Genesis 11. Abram (Abraham) is the instrument to bless all nations (cultures). Using Abram as a prototype person of faith, we see that cross-cultural relations are to be based on mutual blessing rather than fear and hostility.

Languages and Diversity

Given that broken relationships follow sin, Hays concludes that the division of peoples by language in Genesis 11 is a consequence of human sin. “Taken together the two chapters [Genesis 10 and 11] hold in tension two opposing aspects: the unity of the tribes and nations as of one blood under God’s blessing and their diversity into many languages under God’s wrath.”⁹⁸

If Hays is correct in this matter, and the diversity of languages is a result of the wrath of God against the human pursuit of self-centered unity, the diversity of languages created at Babel also foreshadow the awesome work of God in redemption as it pertains to these languages. Pentecost expresses the word of God going forth in all languages, and the John’s

⁹⁷ Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet*, 27.

⁹⁸ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 60.

heavenly visions in Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 reflect the multi-lingual family of God.

For us now, living in this time between Pentecost and the worship service of Revelation, the expansion of Christianity has occurred largely because the missionaries translated the word of God into the vernacular languages. This is a repeated theme in the writings of Lamin Sanneh.⁹⁹ Though the languages might have been Gods wrath at the effort of fallen humans to create a self-styled unity, these same languages today reflect how God is at work to redeem humanity. His covenant with Abram and his commission to the Church reminds us that his love, grace, and blessings are for all peoples and tribes and languages.

REDEMPTION FOR THE NATIONS

“One of the main points that Paul is stressing in Galatians 3:8 is that the inclusion and blessing of the nations/Gentiles was not an after-thought, but was in the mind and purpose of God when God gave his covenant to Abraham.”¹⁰⁰

Throughout the scriptures – from the Table of Nations to the call of Abram to the election of Israel, and on to the New Testament Church – God affirms that his redemptive plan is for all peoples, tribes, ethnicities,

⁹⁹ See both Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989) and Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?*

¹⁰⁰ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 184.

and nations. The failure to see “all peoples” as recipients of the redemptive invitation of God leads the people of God into unbiblical exclusivism. However, God witnesses throughout the Scriptures that he is Lord of the nations.

Ethnicity deteriorates into ethnocentricity when we start believing that our people are better than all others. The people of Israel – given their sense of divine election (see below) – viewed their “pureblood” status as the people of God as a reason to disregard others.

But the Bible does not begin by focusing on the nation of Israel but with the “Table of Nations.” The main theological point of the Table of Nations was not to elevate Israel but rather to show the common origin of all nations. Beyond this, it should be noted that Israel was anything but a pure ethnicity. Hays points out that the foundational people of Israel were basically a mixed-race people who came out of a multi-ethnic world.¹⁰¹

This multi-ethnic foundation underlies a very important but often overlooked aspect of the biblical teaching on race. When we consider the world out of which the covenant to Abram came, Hays asserts that “Coming to grips with the multi-ethnic, non-Caucasian cultural context of the Old Testament is a critical foundational step in developing a truly biblical theology of race.”¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 45.

¹⁰² Ibid.

In *From Every People and Nation*, Hays spends an entire introductory chapter on the ethnic make-up of the Old Testament world. He identifies the fact that Israel is missing as one of the ancient peoples of the world (Genesis 10), this showing that the Israelites actually came from other peoples.¹⁰³ Abraham is identified as an Amorite, and “the biblical tradition presents the ancestors of the tribes of Israel as a mix of western Mesopotamian (Aramean and/or Amorite), Canaanite, and Egyptian.”¹⁰⁴ He concludes: “In its formative stage, Israel was far from being ethnically monolithic. The family of Jacob had Aramean, Amorite, Canaanite, and Egyptian elements within it.”¹⁰⁵

ALL Nations

Thus, when God gives the covenant to Abram to be a blessing to all peoples or all the nations, to whom is he referring? Various scholars identify the phrase “nations” as referring to identity based on ethnicity, territory, theology (deities), kingship (or not) and language. Some point out that from the period of Moses and following, the words distinguishing get more specific - denoting clans, tribes, families or households, and individuals – but that in Genesis, the term is less specific.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Ibid., 32.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 85.

¹⁰⁶ Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 101.

Walter Kaiser evaluates the term and concludes, "...the sweep of the evidence makes it abundantly clear that God's gift of a blessing through the instrumentality of Abraham was to be experienced by nations, clans, tribes, people groups, and individuals. It would be for every size group, from the smallest people group to the greatest nation."¹⁰⁷

The non-specific definition of peoples or nations highlights God's desire to bless all the peoples of the earth: "it is clear from the Abraham story, and from the use that the New Testament makes of this story, that ***God's concern is for the entire created order. People from every conceivable human grouping are called into the people of God***"¹⁰⁸ (emphasis mine).

But this universal desire of God to bless all peoples does not begin with Abram. Walter Kaiser points out that the covenant with Abram was part of the flow of the first 11 chapters of Genesis:

It would be incorrect to say that Abraham was the first to receive the "all peoples" target for the message of the gospel. Genesis 1 through 11 was far from being a nationalistic section that favored the Jews. It is one of the most universalistic sections of the Bible ending with a list in Genesis 10 of seventy nations, the very

¹⁰⁷ Walter Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 19.

¹⁰⁸ Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 103.

“families” and “all peoples” that were to receive the blessing from God through Abraham and his collective seed in Genesis 12:3.¹⁰⁹

He goes on to clarify that God’s universal desire to bless the nations is not the equivalent of universalism: “The expression ‘all peoples’ did not mean that every person on earth would universally believe in the Messiah, but that every ethnic group would receive this blessing of God’s grace and the joy of participating in worshiping and serving him.”¹¹⁰

Hays similarly builds on the link between Genesis 10 and the Abrahamic covenant: “Genesis 10 and the Abrahamic promise combine to form a theme that runs throughout Scripture, constantly pointing to the global and multi-ethnic elements inherent in the overarching plan of God.”¹¹¹ He integrates the first twelve chapters of Genesis: “... the promise in 12:3 clearly connects back to Genesis 10. The promise to Abraham is the answer to the sin and the scattering of Genesis 3-11.”¹¹²

For our purposes, the implication of the “all nations”¹¹³ or “all peoples” emphasis in the Abrahamic covenant highlights God’s redemptive plan to save and bless individuals from all peoples on earth.

¹⁰⁹ Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 8.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 202.

¹¹² Ibid., 61.

¹¹³ The listing in Genesis 10 of the descendants of Noah provides the background for the Rabbinical belief that there were seventy (or seventy-two) nations on earth. Hays, Kaiser, and others see this listing as foreshadowing all the nations who will be blessed through Abram (Genesis 12:1-3). Others link the number seventy (or seventy-two) whom Jesus sends out in Luke 10:1ff to this belief, thus implying that the Gospel of Jesus was for all the nations of the earth. Such an implication is debatable, however, since the disciples were sent out in teams of two.

“This universal scope of the Abrahamic promise is the clinching argument for recognizing the missiological centrality of this text.”¹¹⁴

The repeated covenant with Abram and his descendants illustrates the breadth of God’s plan for the whole earth. Genesis 12:1-3 and 28:14 refer to the blessing for “all peoples,” or “all the kinship groups on earth,”¹¹⁵ indicating that the salvation God offers is not limited to any one ethnicity. Genesis 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, and 28:14 all target the blessing to all nations, expanding the concept beyond just families. Genesis 35:11 promises that the blessing and salvation of God will be to Abraham’s descendants and that he would sire a “community of nations,” perhaps implying the unity-in-diversity reflected in the New Testament ideals for the Church.¹¹⁶ Hays points out that God’s revealed plan in Genesis is to reunite the diverse peoples of the earth as the people of God. Therefore, “Racialization or racial division [and I would add ethnocentrism] in the church thwarts the plan of God and is in direct disobedience to this central biblical theme.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2006), 216.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 194.

¹¹⁷ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 63.

Israel and Outsiders

A problem with this universality theme emerges when we read the Pentateuch. The various laws for Israel seem to lay a foundation for ethnic and cultural separation, not unified diversity. Why do these laws exist?

As Israel lived 400 years in Egypt, they probably developed their own specific sense of ethnic identity because here they were living alongside “Others” who forced them to define themselves as different. After the Exodus, Moses began establishing the Law, but it should be noted that all of the ethnic separation laws of the Old Testament as well as the laws against inter-marriage were always based on theological issues, not racial or ethnic ones. Hays observes, “The inhabitants [of the Promised Land] worship other gods and intermarrying with them would inevitably lead to the apostasy of God’s people.”¹¹⁸

Pointing out that “inter-marriage is the litmus test of racial prejudice,”¹¹⁹ Hays notes Moses’ first marriage was to Zipporah, a Baal worshipping Midianite; then he marries a Cushite (or Ethiopian) woman. Hays documents¹²⁰ that the Egypt of Moses’ upbringing would have included many black Africans, and it is here that he most likely met this

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 77; see also Deuteronomy 7:1-4; Exodus 34:15-16; Joshua 23:12.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 81.

¹²⁰ Ibid., Chapter 4.

woman. Miriam objects and God's condemnation is ironically "white" – making her skin white with leprosy.

Israel was commanded by God to be separated for the purposes of holiness and faithfulness to Yahweh, but his redemptive purposes were not exclusive to the people of Israel. Non-Jews in the revealed plan of salvation in the Old Testament include:

- Those Egyptians who left Egypt and escaped the angel of death with them¹²¹
- Moses' wives and potentially his father-in-law, Jethro (although his religious status is not clarified in the texts)¹²²
- Rahab the harlot¹²³
- Naaman the Syrian¹²⁴
- Ruth the Moabitess¹²⁵

Add to these the sundry laws about care for outsiders, aliens, and strangers,¹²⁶ and one must conclude that the commands toward Israel to remain separated from outsiders was not to establish Israel as the only ethnicity that could be the people of God. The mixed multitude who left Egypt underscored the fact that God's laws, commandments, blessings

¹²¹ Exodus 12:31-39.

¹²² Exodus 3:1; 4:18-27; 18:1-27.

¹²³ Joshua 2:1-24; 6:22-23.

¹²⁴ II Kings 5.

¹²⁵ Ruth 1-4.

¹²⁶ See Numbers 15:15; Deuteronomy 5:14; 10:17-19; 24:14-21; 26:12-13.

and salvation were for all nations and peoples. “The covenant community was a mixed community. God’s salvation was open to all humankind from the very beginning, and those chosen are only channels of God’s blessing to others.”¹²⁷

When God commands compassion for those outside of Israel, he emphasizes that he is “God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, *who shows no partiality*” (emphasis mine)¹²⁸ God’s impartiality in relating to all nations affirmed that he was Lord of all nations and as a result, there was no favorite nation status for Israel.¹²⁹ Instead, the mandates for separation were to keep them faithful so that they could fulfill their God-given role of blessing the nations.

The Problem of Israel as the Elect

Unfortunately, Israel’s election and cultural separation and uniqueness (especially as it developed in the post-exilic period, when “Judaism as a cultural way of life began to emerge, and the Jews began to define their ethnic boundaries very precisely, and Judaism became quite distinctive”¹³⁰) became a stumbling-block. Rather than being a blessing to

¹²⁷ Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., *Africa Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 187.

¹²⁸ Deuteronomy 10:17.

¹²⁹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 96.

¹³⁰ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 33.

all the nations and all other ethnicities, they kept the message of the blessing to God to themselves.

The problem of Israel's behavior, however, was not the only issue. God's specific election of the people of Israel presents us with a very significant theological problem. If God selects one people over against all others, is he showing the favoritism that justifies the thinking that my people are superior?

After all, the reason that the word *goi* or *mishpahot* (Hebrew) or *ethne* (Greek) throughout the Old Testament is translated "Gentiles" rather than nations is that Jews saw themselves as God's chosen people and **every one else** as the "**Other**" – not chosen and therefore inferior, at least in terms of posture before Yahweh.

The readers of Deuteronomy were reminded that the heaven, the heaven of heavens and the earth with all that is in it belonged to Yahweh (Deut. 10:4), but there was a constant danger in Israel of Old Testament times, especially because of her sense of being particularly chosen by God, for this view to shrink into something more ethnic and tribal.¹³¹

Various authors point out, however, that Israel's election was not to provoke superiority or ethnic pride. Kaiser says it succinctly: "The election of Israel, far from meaning the rejection of the other nations of the world,

¹³¹ Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 130.

was the very means of salvation of the nations. Election was not a call to privilege, but a choosing for service.”¹³²

Lesslie Newbigin takes it a step further; reflecting on the rebukes to the people of God in the book of Isaiah, Newbigin observes that God’s chosen are to be a light to people different than themselves (the Gentiles). He says that the Messianic chapters remind us, “Israel has to learn that election is not for comfort and security but for suffering and humiliation.”¹³³

Therefore, we see that In the Old Testament no people or ethnic group is privileged at the expense of others. The choice of Israel as God’s people is not predicated on their superior or exclusive culture but on their marginal status among the peoples of the World.¹³⁴ They are to be instruments of God for the blessing of all people’s of the world. The diversity of humankind is founded in the one God of all peoples. God is not geographically or ethnically bound.¹³⁵ He is not an ethnic God like other gods but is the God of all ethnicities.

Historical Interlude: Long-term Effects of an Errant Sense of Election

Problems related to a misunderstanding of the election of Israel as the unique and separated people of God carries into our world today. Our

¹³² Kaiser, 19.

¹³³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 73.

¹³⁴ See Deuteronomy 7:7ff.

¹³⁵ Jesus underscores this point in his dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4.

American evangelically-influenced prioritization of Israel as “God’s Chosen” has often resulted in the establishment of a theological foundation that God loves one ethnicity more than another. As a result, Palestinians and other Arabic-speaking peoples get relegated to being second-class citizens at best and “enemies of the people of God” at worst.

The Middle Eastern problem is incredibly complex. However, when the equality of all human beings as created in the image of God gets combined with God’s redemptive desire for all the ethnicities on earth, Israel no longer becomes “God’s favorite.” Given the wider teaching of the Bible, Israel becomes one of thousands of ethnic specific groups whose dignity needs to be affirmed and who need to be invited to know and respond to God’s love through Jesus Christ.

A vivid illustration of the misapplication of the election of Israel occurred in the 20th Century in South Africa. The doctrine of election of Israel became the foundation of Apartheid in South Africa. By applying various promises of the book of Joshua to themselves, the Afrikaner settlers saw themselves as the lost tribes of Israel moving into a land that God had promised them.

They experienced Gideon-like victories celebrated in Pretoria at the Voortrekker Monument. Here the monument depicts the famous battle where about 420 Afrikaners circled their wagons and defeated Shaka Zulu’s army of 10,000. They interpreted the historical event as an endorsement of their chosenness, and they went on to see this

chosenness as a reason to establish the legal separation of the races, using the Old Testament commands of God to the people of Israel in Canaan as their foundation.¹³⁶

The South African Apartheid doctrine serves as a sobering reminder: we who are in dominant cultural positions must realize that our discounting of or lording it over other cultures and cultural expressions can be rooted in our own misapplication of the idea of election applied to our own culture.¹³⁷

Beyond Abram: Passages Regarding Redemption for the Nations

The covenant with Abram is not an isolated passage implying a global faith; instead, it is merely a key introduction to God's desire for all the nations of the earth to be blessed. Several key examples follow:

The Book of Ruth, read in its cultural context, was a rebuke to the Jewish ethno-nationalism of that day: It was written during the time of Nehemiah, which was a period of religious and national intolerance.

Rhodes observes:

¹³⁶ For the history of Shaka Zulu, the defeat by the Afrikaners, and the Voortrekker Monument, see: www.historynet.com/wars_conflicts/19_century/3032216.html?page=1&c=y; www.uwc.ac.za/arts/english/interaction/95lvdw.htm; and <http://yovo.info/sa04/pretoria-voortrekker/index.htm>.

¹³⁷ A good example of this was the introduction after the attacks of 9/11/01 of the singing of the song "God Bless America" at Major League Baseball games. On a visit to Egypt in 2004, an Arab Christian shared his perspective on the song. He said, "I know that for most Americans, it is a prayer for your own nation, but we in the Arab world see it as a request that God will bless you over all other nations. One of my Muslim friends told me, 'You see? When they sing that song, they are reminding us that it is indeed a Holy War.'"

This book carried a protest message: God's grace transcends and defies racial, religious, and national exclusiveness. It serves to remind the people of Israel that if Ruth had been rejected because she was a Moabite, then there would have been no David or Solomon, for their lineage was traced directly to Ruth. In the book of Ruth, the foreigner, the stranger, is embraced and honored as an instrument of God's mercy.¹³⁸

Psalm 67 mirrors the promise God gave to Abraham – to be a blessing on all peoples to the ends of the earth. The Psalmist prayer calls for a larger corporate blessing on all the people of God. There is no room for ethnic exclusivity when it comes to God's blessing. God designs that his chosen people will bless all the nations on earth.

Isaiah stands out repeatedly as a prophetic rebuke to the isolationist and exclusivistic tendencies of Israel. Daniel Hays underscores this fact by introducing his study of Isaiah by asserting that "... the book of Isaiah advances the concept of equal salvation for all peoples and nations more than any other prophetic book."¹³⁹

The peace described in Isaiah 2:2-4 is multi-national and inter-racial. The mix of peoples worshipping together includes a Jewish remnant, the hated Assyrians, the Egyptians, and the Black Cushites.¹⁴⁰

The imagery of Isaiah 11:6-9 demonstrates the priority of the Kingdom of

¹³⁸ Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet*, 124.

¹³⁹ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 106.

¹⁴⁰ See Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 107.

God's to bring the powerless and the powerful together. Eric Law observes, "If cultures are analogous to the different animals, then Isaiah 11:6-9 becomes a vision of culturally diverse peoples living together in harmony and peace."¹⁴¹

In Isaiah 49:6 appears in the second of the so-called "Servant Songs" in which Isaiah reminds the Israelites in exile that the purposes of the "Servant of the Lord" is more than simply the restoration of Israel and rescue from its captivity. God points the people of Israel outward, beyond their cultural limitations and their ethnic exclusivity. To be concerned solely for the redemption of the people of Israel was "too small a thing" for the God of all nations. "Israel was special [and so the Church] because it was given a universal concern as a nation. Unlike other nations that could and would live for self-interest and self-preservation, Israel would always be nation set apart for the blessing of all."¹⁴²

Paul the apostle applies this passage to his own ministry and to his band of church planters¹⁴³ because he wanted the New Testament believers to know that – no matter what their dire circumstances as exiles or oppressed or persecuted people – they still were on mission with God. Christopher Wright underscores this when he explains that Paul could

¹⁴¹ Eric H.F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Lie Down With the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), 3.

¹⁴² Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet*, 39.

¹⁴³ Acts 13:46-47.

apply Isaiah 49:6 to himself because “the mission of the church flows from the mission of God and the fulfillment of God’s mandate.”¹⁴⁴

The Book of Jonah is arguably the most specific Old Testament text for rebuking ethnocentricity and pointing out God’s love for all peoples – in this case, Jonah’s archenemies, the Ninevites. Jonah establishes perhaps the ultimate case study of dealing with the hostile “Other” from a combative, historically hated other ethnic group.

J. B. Pritchard describes in great detail the exploits of Assyrian kings. They conquered armies, took captives, piled up booty, beheaded other kings and impaled them on pikes. Stories include vast fields filled with corpses and conquered cities burned to the ground.¹⁴⁵

Others describe Nineveh as “the world-gobbling Assyrian empire, one of the cruelest and most rapacious empires of the ancient world.”¹⁴⁶ The severity of Nineveh underscores the truly counter-cultural calling on Jonah to go to these people:

It is perhaps difficult for us to feel the resonances the word “Nineveh” had for a pious Jew. We need to think of some words, names of people or places, which arouse in our minds and hearts

¹⁴⁴ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 67.

¹⁴⁵ J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), 274-317.

¹⁴⁶ Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 125.

today; possible words may be Hitler, Pol Pot, Stalin, Hutu/Tutsi, Auschwitz. Cali, Srebrenica, Chechnya, Saddam Hussein.¹⁴⁷

Jonah clearly had reason to resist going to Nineveh, but the overall text reveals that his ultimate battle was related to his ethnocentric desire that God would exclusively bless and revive Israel.

Clearly Jonah was eager to go and prophesy God's blessing on Israel in the time of King Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25 is the only other time Jonah is mentioned in the Old Testament), but a revival in Assyria was not what *he* viewed to be in the best interest of the only people God should be interested in – Israel. Jonah did not realize the universality of Yahweh's purpose and compassion.

Jonah did not realize that the basis of a relationship with Yahweh is obedience to his will, which goes beyond all ethnic distinctions.¹⁴⁸

Another indication of Jonah's ethnic hatred of the Ninevites pertains to the way he interprets his own message in Jonah 3. Jonah's five-word Hebrew sermon – "Forty more days and Nineveh – overthrown" – has two possible meanings: "The writer has cleverly used a word ('overthrown') that can be taken two ways: either it means 'flattened by judgment'; or it can mean 'turned upside down' and refer to an astonishing change of heart and life."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Peart, *Separate No More*, 101.

¹⁴⁹ Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 129.

Obviously, Jonah's fury over the second option being fulfilled reveals that he had "no concern for that great city."¹⁵⁰ His only desire was that his enemies be flattened. When they repent and God relents, Jonah resents!

Though there are a number of other Old Testament illustrations of God's desire for the redemption of all the nations and peoples, I will conclude my Old Testament discussion with Jonah because it best illustrates the radical transformation we are trying to affect in people when we start confronting ethnocentrism – especially when that ethnocentrism carries with it (as Jonah did) the hatred of the "Other." Jonah did not run to Tarshish because he was afraid of the Ninevites. He ran because he was afraid of the mercy of God and what it might imply both for the Ninevites and for his desire to avenge his people.¹⁵¹

Jonah illustrates the challenge of affirming ethnic identity but combating ethnic superiority. It will require a huge dosage of the mercy of God, a desire to see even our enemies forgiven, and a willingness to open our arms to people we have either been separated from because of racism or because of historical hatred.

God's Global Plan in the New Testament

In the New Testament, God constantly brings the people of God back to the fact that his love is for all peoples and his plan is for the

¹⁵⁰ Jonah 4:11.

¹⁵¹ See Jonah 4:1ff.

redemption of peoples, tribes, linguistic groups, and ethnically diverse people. But this redemption – especially as it is described in the ecclesiologically descriptive book of Ephesians – does **not** mean individual ethnic groupings worshipping in homogeneous units.¹⁵² Instead, God, through the redemptive work of Christ (see Chapter 2), breaks down ethnocentric divisions and brings us – with all of our diversity – into a new family.

In spite of the wideness and multi-cultural plan of God, the Jewish issue of being the unique people of God carries over into the New Testament – both in the ministry of Jesus and in the early church. But the overwhelming, international plan of God prevails, diversifying the church and announcing Good News for all.

Matthew, the Gospel writer to the Jews, includes the “nations” throughout his Gospel. Matthew’s genealogy includes four Gentile women: Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites; Ruth is a Moabitess; and Bathsheba (married to Uriah, who Matthew mentions by name) was most likely a Hittite.¹⁵³

¹⁵² I will discuss the Homogeneous Unit Principle at the close of this section, but it’s worth noting that I incorporate a critique on his “Homogeneous Unit Principle” (HUP) approach in my course designed for use with Development Associates International. In light of the fact that 25% of the leaders we train are Christian workers in India – where McGavran developed his HUP theories – I will have these students read the Lausanne Occasional Paper summarizing the findings of the 1977 Pasadena Consultation on the Homogeneous Unit Principle (<http://community.gospelcom.net/Brix?pageID=14290>).

¹⁵³ Hays suggests “that Matthew uses the interracial marriage phenomenon in Jesus’ lineage to introduce the ‘inclusion of the Gentiles’ theme.” (Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 159).

Matthew's birth account of Jesus uniquely includes the *Magi* from the East, foreshadowing the "*panta ta ethne*" conclusion of Matthew in Matthew 24 and 28. Matthew's inclusive vision takes a word like *ethne* and moves it from a term of racial hostility to a word describing the "all peoples" plan of God:

In intertestamental times the word *ethnos* had a somewhat derogatory ring about it; it referred to those who were *not* the people of God. But here in Matthew our Lord's words are inclusive. The blessing promised to and through Abraham is to come true in undreamed of ways. All are to be invited to become disciples of the risen Lord.¹⁵⁴

In ***Luke-Acts***, the "blessing to all nations" promise to Abraham¹⁵⁵ factors significantly into Luke's writings. Abraham's name occurs twenty-two times in Luke-Acts. Luke's emphasis on the inclusion of the "outsider" results in his being the most cross-culturally vision expanding of the Gospels. Then he follows with the book of Acts, describing the multi-cultural plan of God being played out in the early church.

Luke and Acts include multiple stories of "outsiders" – from the Gospel's inclusion of women, Gentiles, and Samaritans to the stories in Acts that include the Ethiopian eunuch and the Antioch leader from Niger. In contrast to Luke, other gospels refer to Samaritans only twice;¹⁵⁶ Luke includes six Samaritan stories.

¹⁵⁴ Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 182.

¹⁵⁵ See Luke 1:54-55, 1:72-73, and 2:30-32 – as well as 24:47.

Luke is unique among the Gospel writers because of his focus on the issue of ethnicity for the new people of God. Hays observes:

Luke connects the theology of salvation for all peoples back to Genesis 10-12, showing that the expansion of Christianity to all peoples is a continuity and a fulfillment of these early chapters of Genesis. Thus the inclusion of ethnically diverse people into the people of God was always God's intention. Luke is also careful to note the important role that the Spirit plays in overcoming racial and cultural barriers and boundaries.¹⁵⁷

Later, in his depiction of the Spirit-transformed early church, Luke stresses not only that the gospel demands to be proclaimed to all people of all ethnicities, but that the gospel also demands that all old culturally driven worldviews regarding racial prejudice be completely abandoned by the new people of God. Furthermore, the issue is not just *thinking* racial equality, but *doing* racial equality.”¹⁵⁸

Luke's Gospel concludes with the mandate to preach repentance to all nations.¹⁵⁹ Then he commences his second volume, the record in Acts, with the reiterated commission.¹⁶⁰ This time, however, he delineates the

¹⁵⁶ Matthew 10:5 and John 4.

¹⁵⁷ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 179.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. The active sense of “doing racial equality” factors heavily into one of the main conclusions of this paper and the related leadership training course; namely, that a Spirit-transformed church must exercise *intentionality* towards racial and ethnic reconciliation.

¹⁵⁹ Luke 24:47.

recipients more specifically – Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, describing both the “geographical and ethnical universalism for the destination of the gospel.”¹⁶¹ In a strong rebuke to the narrow nationalism of the disciples’ question in Acts 1:6, Jesus sends them out across ethnic lines (mentioning Samaria specifically would confirm to the disciples that he was not just referring to diaspora Jews), empowered by the Holy Spirit, to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

The Church in Acts. The Book of Acts could be the subject of an entire dissertation on God’s affirmation of ethnicity and hatred of ethnocentrism because, in the words of Ajith Fernando, one of the main purposes of the book of Acts was to convey the message of “breaking human barriers in Christ.”¹⁶²

Pentecost. The Acts 1:8 commission to all the ends of the earth starts towards immediate fulfillment in Acts 2. Acts 2:5 records that there were people “from every nation under heaven.” Fernando writes: “We have already seen that Pentecost overcame the effects of Babel. We saw how when the disciples praised God, they did not do so in the Greek language, which most of the people knew. Instead, they praised God in the vernacular dialects of these people.”¹⁶³ Building on this theme,

¹⁶⁰ Acts 1:8.

¹⁶¹ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 163.

¹⁶² Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary - Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 30.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

Schaupp and Harris see God's affirmation of ethnic specificity at

Pentecost:

God created humans to be diverse in our language, race and gender. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, the ears weren't changed to hear one gospel in Greek or Aramaic, but the gospel itself was translated into many languages.¹⁶⁴

British pastor Roy Clements notes that Pentecost set the tone for the diverse Body of Christ: "the Pentecostal tongues were a pointer to the way in which the Holy Spirit was going to break down social barriers and create an unprecedented kind of internationalism. Unlike the imperialisms of men, the Spirit had no ambition to homogenize the peoples of the world into a uniform Christian culture."¹⁶⁵

John Stott links the Pentecost experience as descriptive for the church Christ desires; he also connects the event historically to the Old Testament and eschatologically to the future vision of Revelation. Stott writes, "Nothing could have demonstrated more clearly than [Pentecost] the multiracial, multinational, multilingual nature of the kingdom of Christ."¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, Stott continues, "this event not only connects back to Genesis 10 through 12 but points forward to the scene depicted in

¹⁶⁴ Doug Schaupp and Paula Harris, *Being White in a Multi-Ethnic World: Our Part in the Body* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2006), 27.

¹⁶⁵ Roy Clements, *The Church That Turned the World Upside Down* (Cambridge, England: Crossway, 1992), 23.

¹⁶⁶ John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1990), 68.

Revelation 7:9, where the redeemed will come from every nation, tribe, people, and language.”¹⁶⁷

Acts 7 and the Sermon of Stephen links to the expansion of the church in three ways. First, the sermon provokes a persecution of Christians that will force the Jerusalem believers to decentralize and launch out into Judea and Samaria.¹⁶⁸ Second, the sermon broke down the ethnocentric barriers associated with historical Judaism. “Stephen’s explosive sermon made Judaism a universal faith. Anyone could come to God and be fully related to him without adopting an ethnocentric, Palestinian form of religion.”¹⁶⁹ Finally, this sermon gets preached to the Pharisee Saul (later Paul), planting the seed of the universal message of God in a man who will become the apostle to the Gentiles.

Acts 8. As mentioned above, the persecution of the church forcibly launches them out towards the ethnic and geographic destinations of Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. The introductory verse in Acts 8:1 mentions the first three: Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and Philip’s witness starts with Samaritans.

But Acts 8 does not stop in Samaria because witness to the Samaritans is followed by the conversion of the first Black African, the

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Acts 8:1 reflects progress towards the fulfillment of the Acts 1:8 mandate.

¹⁶⁹ Thom and Marcia Hopler, *Reaching the World Next Door* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 78.

Ethiopian eunuch.¹⁷⁰ As a result, Acts 8 in its complete form represents symbols of the Gospel's anticipated spread to the ends of the earth.

Philip in Acts 8 also underscores the role and power of the Holy Spirit to transform ethnocentric worldviews, a critical theme in Luke-Acts. We think of it as crossing into geographically close, similar culture. But Philip's view of his own ethnicity and the ethnicity of the "Other" had been radically transformed by the unifying work of the Holy Spirit. He became a Spirit-empowered witness to ethnically different people Israelites had been taught to hate for generations:

Readers today tend to gloss over the magnitude of Philip's work in Samaria, for we usually forget how much mutual animosity existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. Sociologically and missiologically, Philip's action was extremely profound, for he was able to put aside the generations of prejudice and hate that were an

¹⁷⁰ Hays points out that the word *Aithiopia* in Greek translates literally 'burnt faces' (Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 34-39). Identifying his exact homeland as modern-day Ethiopia is questionable; he was likely from the people simply called "Nubian" from southern Egypt. Whatever his exact homeland, Luke's point in recording the story is that he was culturally, ethnically and most likely physically "Other" to Philip and to the Jews. Witherington, citing several ancient Greek sources, posits that the reference to Ethiopia (Cush) represents 'the ends of the earth', and thus the conversion of the eunuch foreshadows the complete fulfillment of Jesus' mandate in Acts 1:8 (quoted in Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 175). Hays takes the implications of the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian even further, noting the chronological conversion of an African before the Gentile Cornelius:

...this Black African believed, was baptized, and returned home before the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10, who symbolizes – the Roman world. The Ethiopian eunuch was also converted several years before Paul received his Macedonian call to take the gospel onto European soil. Barrett underscores the startling and theologically significant nature of the Ethiopian event by stating, "His conversion marked an even more radical stage in the rise of the Gentile mission than Peter's visit to Caesarea." Polhill echoes this view, writing "It is in any event of interest to note the first converted 'foreigner' in Acts was an African, and one could say that the mission began there, long before Paul ever took it to European soil" (Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 175-176).

integral part of his own culture. The power of the Spirit in Philip's Samaritan mission was probably not limited to the working of miraculous signs (Acts 8:67), but was also actively involved in changing Philip's worldview and his inherited attitude toward the Samaritans. Likewise, if we Christians today are to have any hope of obeying the biblical command to form a unified people of God out of diverse ethnicities, we too must acknowledge and follow the critical leading and empowering of the Spirit.¹⁷¹

Acts 10 and Peter's Encounter with Cornelius represents a dramatic turning point in opening the Jewish-dominated church to becoming the church for all peoples. Cornelius represents the Roman world in specific but the Gentile world in general.

The story represents the full invitation of the Gentiles into the Church, but it also represents the Spirit-driven transformation that had to occur in ethnocentric Peter. Peter, like Jonah towards the Ninevites, had no worldview of Gentiles that desired to include them in the merciful plan of God. They were unclean and, as far as Peter was concerned, still relegated to the "outer courts" of the action of God.

But Acts 10 is the story of two conversions. Will Willimon asks, "Is this the story of the conversion of a Gentile or the conversion of an

¹⁷¹ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 164.

apostle?" He answers, "Both Peter and Cornelius needed changing if God's mission is to go forward."¹⁷²

The point of this extraordinary passage is that the salvation God offers is to all humans everywhere, regardless of racial background or characteristics. Peter had to learn that "God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."¹⁷³

Eckman makes the point succinctly: "Racial hatred or discrimination is impossible when one sees people the way God does."¹⁷⁴ Acts 10, therefore, is a critical turning point because the Holy Spirit provokes Peter to engage in a meal, an interaction, and eventually a report summary to other church leaders about the work of the Spirit to take the ethnic and cultural expansion of the church out of their hands. As he reports, he can only confess his own surprise that "these uncircumcised pagans have been made part of God's household. So the Church is moved one step on the road toward becoming a home for people of all nations and a sign of the unity of all."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Will Willimon, *Acts* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 96.

¹⁷³ Acts 10:34.

¹⁷⁴ Eckman, "The Ethics of Race," 74.

¹⁷⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 124).

An Ethnocentric Church?

It is erroneous to assume, however, that the Jewish leadership of the church accepted this ethnic diversity with open arms. The Old Testament self-view of being “elect” carried over into the church in Acts. They desired to stay in Jerusalem and needed persecution to disperse them (Acts 8:1). The Jerusalem church was too comfortable and too mono-cultural, even to the point of dealing uncomfortably with the convert Saul, trying to send him out to Tarsus (Acts 11). Acts 11:19 reminds us that ethnocentrism prevailed – even during persecution.

Acts 11:19 reminds us that ethnocentricity dies hard, even in the hearts of those who have been dramatically converted. These followers of Christ had experienced the persecution that dispersed them. They had heard the testimony of Peter of his encounter with Cornelius, and they had heard their church leader testify that “God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). Perhaps they had even heard the testimony of Philip who had witnessed the conversion of Samaritans and the Ethiopian. Now, even as wandering evangelists, many of the Jewish converts to Christ persisted in evangelizing only their kind.

But the breakthrough occurs when some of them move beyond their discriminatory witness to proclamation to the non-Jews. They begin to understand that this Messiah was for all peoples, and Peter and Philip’s experiences were not isolated miracles but rather the pattern of God to launch the church out so that they could indeed “bless all nations.” They

preached to “outsiders”, and “a great number of people believed,” and as a result, the Antioch church was planted.

Paterson points out that this anonymous group of preachers in Acts 11 produced a change in mentality that rendered Antioch an inclusive church at the outset. “From now on there was no ‘one special group’ who alone had the right to hear the Gospel. The church had a debt to every group now.”¹⁷⁶

The Antioch Church: God’s Multicultural Paradigm

As a result, and in contrast to the church in Jerusalem, the Antioch church was healthy, outward-looking and committed to taking the Gospel to all peoples. At the foundation of the Antioch church (the sending model presented in Acts 13) were dispersed Jews – men from Cyprus and Cyrene (Acts 11:20) [thus implying a bigger world view than the Jerusalem based believers] – who reached out to Gentiles, the Hellenists, unlike their associates who spoke only to Jews.

Multi-ethnic outreach at the beginning of the Antioch church teaches us an important principle: churches being planted in multi-cultural settings will flourish better if they are planted by multi-ethnic church planting teams. The diverse foundation of the church in Antioch included a multi-cultural, diverse leadership team that included a Cyrenian, an African, and others from various strata of society.

¹⁷⁶ Ross Paterson, *The Antioch Factor: the Hidden Message of the Book of Acts* (Kent, England: Sovereign World, 2000), 92.

Barnabas, a Jew from the Jerusalem church, is mentioned first, but he was originally from Cyprus.¹⁷⁷ Simeon is also called Niger, meaning black. It's likely that this term was added to point out the fact that he was an African. Lucius was from Cyrene in North Africa (present-day Libya), and Manaen is a Jew who was likely from some royal family because he is identified as having "been brought up with" Herod the tetrarch. Finally there is Saul, an educated Jew originally from Tarsus.¹⁷⁸

Hays, whose concern is largely to show the inclusions of Africans in the New Testament, concentrates on the leadership role of Simeon, called Niger:

In Acts 13... a Black African is now cited as one four leaders in the new, burgeoning Church in Antioch. So Luke shows clearly that not only is the gospel to go to all peoples, including Black Africans, but also that all people, including Black Africans, are to be integrally included into the Church, the new people of God.¹⁷⁹

A diverse church with diverse leadership became the pre-eminent missionary-sending church in the book of Acts. The Antioch fellowship becomes the church who sends the cross-cultural missionary team of Barnabas and Saul, who launch the church into the Gentile world.

Acts 15. In response to the ethnic expansion of the Gospel and the church to the Gentiles, the church leader James makes a revolutionary

¹⁷⁷ Acts 4:36.

¹⁷⁸ Fernando, *Acts*, 373-374.

¹⁷⁹ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 178.

statement: “God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself.” James’ statement highlights the globally expanding vision of the church leadership. Fernando observes:

In the Old Testament (LXX) the “nations” or “Gentiles” (*ethne*) stand in contrast to “the people” (*laos*), which usually refers to the Jews. Deuteronomy 14:2 says, for example, “You are a people [LXX *laos*] holy to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples [LXX *ethne*, nations] on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession.” In other words, the Israelites have been called out from the nations to be a people for the Lord God. James says the opposite: ***From within the nations God has taken a people for himself.***¹⁸⁰

Acts 17. Acts 17, especially Paul’s Sermon on Mars Hill, provides the foundation for preaching the Gospel beyond the biblical people of God – the Jews. Paul here outlines a biblical vision for a multi-racial society, making four specific affirmations in Acts 17:22-31:

First, he proclaimed the unity of the human race, or the God of creation. Being equally created by him and like him, we are equal in his sight in worth and dignity, and therefore have an equal right to respect and justice. Second, Paul proclaimed the diversity of ethnic cultures, or the God of history. We must assert both the unity of the human race and the diversity of ethnic cultures simultaneously. Third, Paul proclaimed the

¹⁸⁰ Fernando, *Acts*, 417-418.

finality of Jesus Christ, or the God of Revelation. We learn, then, that a respectful acceptance of the diversity of cultures does not imply an equal acceptance of the diversity of religions. Fourth, Paul proclaimed the glory of the Christian Church, or the God of Redemption. The church must therefore exhibit its multiracial, multinational, and multicultural nature.¹⁸¹

John Stott evaluates this Mars Hill sermon and uses it as rebuke to the Church growth strategy based on Homogeneous Units.¹⁸²

There has been considerable debate in recent years whether a local church could or should ever be culturally homogeneous. A consultation on this issue concluded that no church should ever acquiesce in such a condition: "All of us are agreed that in many situations a homogeneous unit church can be a legitimate and authentic church. Yet we are also agreed that it can never be complete in itself. Indeed, if it remains in isolation, it cannot reflect the universality and diversity of the Body of Christ. Nor can it grow to maturity. Therefore, every homogeneous unit church must take active steps to broaden its fellowship in order to demonstrate visibly the unity and the variety of Christ's Church."¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ John Stott, *Involvement: Volume II: Social and Sexual Relationships in the Modern World* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1985), 89-94.

¹⁸² See comments at the close of this section on the theology and missiology of the Homogeneous Unit Principle.

¹⁸³ Stott, *Involvement, Volume II*, 94 (quoting from "The Pasadena Report," (Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 1, 1977), 6.

The church examples that we find in the Book of Acts foreshadow several of the key principles which will undergird conclusions made in this study. First, there are repeated cross-cultural encounters (linguistically, socially, and culturally), showing the significance of first-hand experience as tools God can use to shatter stereotypes and confront racial or ethnic bias. Second, the emphasis on Table Fellowship (more on this later) reminds us of equality in the Body of Christ.¹⁸⁴ Third, the ethnically diverse leadership in the church at Antioch underscores the truth that leaders must model that which they say they believe. Finally, the initiative of God throughout Acts, first forcing the church outward (Acts 8:1), then instructing the leaders to go cross-culturally (Acts 10), and then confirming his call to bring the Good News of the Gospel to all the peoples (Jew and Gentile alike (Acts 15 and the ministry of Paul)) – exemplifies the principle of intentionality in pursuing the united diversity which God desires.

¹⁸⁴ Walls highlights the significance of eating together and celebrating the Lord's Supper in the book of Acts. Writing about that early fellowship, he observes, "Two lifestyles met at the institution that had once symbolized the ethnic and cultural division: the meal table. One of the most noticeable features of life in the Jesus community in Jerusalem had been that the followers of Jesus took every opportunity to eat together" (Walls, "The Ephesian Moment," 77).

CHAPTER 3: FROM THE CROSS TO CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

RECONCILIATION THROUGH THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Christ brought us together through his death on the Cross.

The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility.

*Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father.*¹⁸⁵

Jesus' sacrificial death served not only to reconcile us to God but to each other. God does not forgive us through Jesus so that we and our own culturally isolated "group" experiences the benefits of salvation alone. He reconciles us through the cross of Christ so that we can view all "Others" through the eyes of reconciliation. Our salvation "eyes" must look upward to the Lord who saves us, but they must also look outward so that we see all of those loved and redeemed by God – from all nations and peoples.

As Christians, we are "crucified with Christ"¹⁸⁶ and that crucifixion includes the crucifixion of our ethnocentricity, our cultural sense of supremacy, and our desire to find our identity at the expense of another.

¹⁸⁵ Ephesians 2:16-17 in Eugene Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1993).

¹⁸⁶ Galatians 2:20.

When we die with Christ, these destructive elements die, and when we are raised again to newness of life, our salvation means the re-making of our identity in Christ.

This does not mean the complete subtraction of our ethnic identity nor our incorporation into some homogeneous, culture-less Christian family. Instead, conversion leads us to a new identity that finds itself first in our relationship with Christ and with his people. We still have ethnic uniqueness, but we submit it to our first identity: members of the household of faith.

When I am “in Christ”, I can celebrate my ethnicity and the cultural background from which I come, but because my security is now “in Christ,” I no longer need to find my identity at the expense of another. I can accept and forgive the “Other” because I am accepted and forgiven by the grace of God. It is interesting to note here the parallel statements of God, identifying himself as the “I AM THAT I AM” in Exodus 4, and Paul the apostle, asserting that “by the grace of God I am what I am.”¹⁸⁷

God alone is self-existent, as expressed in the name he gives to Moses in Exodus. We – as created beings – derive our existence from some other point of reference. As sinners, we often find our identity in our ethnic or racial identity – often at the expense of other races or ethnicities. When Paul writes, “by the grace of God I am what I am,” he asserts that

¹⁸⁷ I Corinthians 15:10.

now – as a person reconciled by the grace of God expressed on the cross – I find my primary identity in him, the self-existent I AM.

As followers of the crucified Christ, therefore, we are called to relativize our ethnic and cultural identity and let Jesus give it back to us. Using the analogy of baptism in Romans 6:1-4, our old superiority or inferiority ethnic or other identities are buried with Christ in baptism, and then raised again to a new of life, with all secondary identities being made new in the process.

Paul the apostle illustrates how his own life was transformed from his old identity to a new life in Christ. Like Jesus, he lived with both a sense of cultural particularity from which he could be aware of his ethnic heritage, his status, and even his old basis for ethnocentricity.¹⁸⁸ Yet he also had a sense of universality, an identity that enabled him to remain detached from his ethnic identity and citizenship so that he could minister as all things to all men so that he might be able to win some.¹⁸⁹

When we are reconciled through Christ, it is a full conversion. If we are going to follow Jesus, we cannot have Jesus and ethnic identity as equals. Jesus fills the whole picture of who we are. We respond to his “breaking down the barriers” and empty ourselves of any of our

¹⁸⁸ See Paul’s link to his own Jewish identity in Philippians 3 as well as his allusion to his ethnic pedigree in Acts 26. In addition, note that Paul knew how to use his Roman citizenship if it could help serve the Gospel (Acts 22:22-29).

¹⁸⁹ I Corinthians 9:22.

ethnocentric tendencies. Then we let Jesus redeem it and give it back to us.

The theological significance of this can be summarized in a relatively simple way. If we ask, “What term or adjective is the **primary** descriptor of our identity?”, we will discover the completeness of our conversion. The recurring New Testament theme of being “in Christ” serves to answer the question. Each one of us has a cultural and ethnic heritage that comes with us when we enter a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. But when we come into that relationship, our first identity should be our belonging to the multi-cultural family of God.

For example, many people in the United States describe themselves as Christians, but if we ask, “Are you a Christian who happens to be born in America or are you an American who happens to be Christian?”, we begin to get to the core of the issue. If I am first an American, then American values and priorities will supersede my Christian values and my Christian faith will be filtered through an American lens. If, on the other hand, I am a Christian first, then my national, ethnic or cultural identity must be evaluated by biblical values and priorities.

Antoine Rutayisire is from Rwanda. He is a Christian evangelist and he is ethnically a Tutsi (the group the Hutu extremists were trying to exterminate in 1994’s brutal genocide). Speaking from his experience, he articulates this idea of “first identity” in Christ:

Knowing who you are in Jesus Christ is a great thing because in genocide, the first thing which is denied to you is your value as a human being. And during those days the voice of the Lord kept telling me, "Remember, you are not a Tutsi. That's not your identity. You are a child of God." And I tell you, that is who we are. We need to preach the cross of Jesus Christ to give value to the world.¹⁹⁰

Perhaps this idea of relativized local identity because our supreme identity is in Christ is over-simplifying. Almost any culture where Christian faith has existed for two or three generations can easily start making cultural values equivalent to Christian values (read the earlier section on Apartheid in South Africa, for example). The need for a globalized faith emerges here again. In order to understand what it truly means to be both particular and universal in Christ, I need others from outside my group to help me see where I am blinded by my own cultural biases. In order to understand how to co-exist with a universal message of salvation existing within my indigenized, cultural defined faith, I need to go beyond myself so that I can understand, like Peter with Cornelius, that "God does not show favoritism but accepts men who fear him and do what is right."¹⁹¹

Rutayisire makes this point again:

Not only God's children – that is our identity – but we are also God's community. ... The Bible says that when you are in Christ,

¹⁹⁰ *The Mission of an Evangelist* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 2001), 257.

¹⁹¹ Acts 10:34.

“There is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Colossians 3:11, NIV). We are one family in Christ. We need to work hard at rebuilding the fellowship of the holy nation of God. The closer we get to Christ, the closer we get to each other. And that is how we build our community. Get nearer to Christ; you will get nearer and closer to your neighbor and your friend.¹⁹²

Equally Justified by Faith

In the book of Galatians, the issue of “justification by faith” gets clarified. The “Judaizers” were seeking to attach specific cultural expressions to the requirements for salvation. By addressing “justification by faith” Paul addresses both a theological and a social problem: “The Church's misunderstanding of justification led to a social stratification within the Church, a stratification that was contrary to the unity in Christ that lay at the heart of the Christian faith.”¹⁹³

Translating this theology for the Church today, Hays quotes Hansen: “If a church does not defend in practice the equality and unity of all in Christ, it implicitly communicates that justification is not by faith but by race, social status or some other standard.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² *The Mission of an Evangelist*, 257.

¹⁹³ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 183.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 183.

The message of salvation through Christ is not conditioned or limited by race, culture, or ethnic identity. Jesus speaks into all cultures (“the indigenizing principle”) but the Gospel transcends all cultures (“the pilgrim principle”). No group is favored over another. Jesus’ death on the cross invites all people from every nation to receive the gift of forgiveness. At the foot of the cross, the ground is level.

Perhaps the strongest biblical affirmation of Christ’s work in making his redemption and forgiveness available to all – in order to create a united, diverse family of God – appears in Paul’s ecclesiology-focused letter to the Ephesians.

Paul’s ecclesiology (which will factor heavily into the next section) teaches a unity in diversity which is based on the work of Christ on the cross to break down the dividing walls between us and God and also between us and others from whom we are separated.

In Ephesians 2, Paul describes in detail the journey from being dead in our trespasses and sins to being saved by the grace of God. But then he goes on to describe reconciliation through Christ’s death not only to God but also to one another. Salvation involves a community of humanity; it is “more than believers receiving forgiveness of their sins. . . . Salvation means union with one another.”¹⁹⁵

Commenting on the work of Christ as described in Ephesians to break down the walls that divide us, Snodgrass observes:

¹⁹⁵ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 190.

Nowhere is this theology more important for modern Christians than in dealing with *racial hostility*. Christians of other races are part of us, and divisions cannot be allowed to continue. The racial barrier is like a festering wound in the body of Christ... Sunday is often the most segregated day of the week, for Christians worship along racial lines... The perversion of both active and passive racism must be challenged and stopped. . . Racism will have to be treated on two levels, both as a general societal problem and specifically within the body of Christ. Racism in any form is prohibited by the equality of all people before God and by his unrestricted love. But the theology of the body of Christ deals with the issue at another level. ***The point is not merely that all Christians are equal; rather, the point is that all Christians have been joined, which has far more significance and impact***¹⁹⁶ (emphasis mine).

John Stott likewise emphasizes the importance of this application for the health of the Church. He speaks prophetically regarding the inter-racial and inter-ethnic themes of reconciliation connected to the death of Christ in Ephesians. He confronts the same inconsistencies mentioned by Snodgrass when he writes:

It is simply impossible, with any shred of Christian integrity, to go on proclaiming that Jesus by his cross has abolished the old divisions and created a single new humanity of love, while at the same time

¹⁹⁶ K. Snodgrass, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 150-151.

we are contradicting our message by tolerating racial or social or other barriers within our church fellowship.¹⁹⁷

Stott goes on, calling the church to confess our failure in this regard, repent over our hypocrisy and our culturally defined excuses, and determine to take action. He asserts that the practical implementation of the truth of Jesus death “breaking down the dividing walls” between separated peoples ought to be a top priority in the church.

I wonder if anything is more urgent today... than that the church should be, and should be seen to be, what by God's purpose and Christ's achievement it already is – a single new humanity, a model of human community, a family of reconciled brothers and sisters who love their Father and love each other, the evident dwelling place of God by his Spirit. Only then will the world believe in Christ as peacemaker. Only then will God receive the glory due his name.¹⁹⁸

Historical Interlude: United Around the Table

One of the little known background factors in the dissolution of Apartheid in South Africa was the work of a ministry called *Koinonia* led by

¹⁹⁷ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1979), 111-112.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

“doubly converted” Dutch Reformed Pastor Nico Smith.¹⁹⁹ Nico is an Afrikaner and a former member of the *Broderbund*, the Afrikaner champions of Apartheid (the sociological equivalent of the Ku Klux Klan). In the 1970’s, as a Dutch Reformed missionary to a Black section of South Africa, Nico Smith was confronted with the inconsistency of his own Apartheid worldview. He found himself with Christian brothers and sisters that his worldview forbade him to eat with.

This deeply troubled him and led to his second conversion – much like Peter in Acts 10. He abandoned the *Broderbund* and moved in the Black Township of Mamelodi (near Pretoria) to become one of the first white men to pastor a Black church. From there he founded *Koinonia*, a ministry that brought whites and blacks together to share a meal. This “table fellowship,” in a land where an estimated 70% of the population was in racially segregated churches on Sunday morning, started to break down the dividing walls – to the point that Nico was named “Man of the Year” by *Time Magazine – Africa* in 1988,²⁰⁰ several years before the release of Nelson Mandela and the subsequent dissolution of the Apartheid system.

For the New Testament Church in many cross-cultural situations, the table symbolized unity. Walls writes, “Two races and cultures

¹⁹⁹ The complete story of Nico Smith’s transformation from racist to reconciler is told in Rebecca De Saintonge, *Outside the Gate: the Biography of Nico Smith* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989).

²⁰⁰ See <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,967792-1,00.html>.

historically separated by the meal together now met at table to share the knowledge of Christ.”²⁰¹

NEW CREATIONS IN THE NEW HUMANITY

The work of Christ in destroying the barriers between separated peoples must be worked out in daily human experience. Together we must grow into what Paul calls a new humanity. Andrew Walls states it succinctly, “The church must be diverse because humanity is diverse; it must be one because Christ is one.”²⁰² Reflecting on the entirety of the Ephesian letter, Walls asserts that the potential of cultural homogeneity had already been dismissed when the Church decided not to enforce the Torah on Gentiles. Instead, the Church in Ephesians is supposed to be a visual reminder of all peoples coming together in Christ, “a celebration of the union of irreconcilable entities, the breaking down of the wall of partition, brought about by Christ’s death (Ephesians 2: 13-18).”²⁰³ Using the building metaphor from Ephesians 2, we come together as diverse bricks so that God, in Christ and through his work of reconciliation, can be built into a marvelously diverse household of God.

²⁰¹ Walls, “Ephesian Moment,” 78. Walls continues, underscoring the challenge of cross-cultural table fellowship for the early church: “The shared table was the acid test. It stood for diverse humanity redeemed by Christ and sharing in him.” The significance of equality around the table appeared when Peter backslid into ethnic separation under the influence of the Judaizers, and he refused to eat with Gentiles (see Galatians 2:11-14). His action demonstrated that he had retreated from the message of the vision God had given him in Acts 10.

²⁰² Ibid., 77.

²⁰³ Ibid.

We believe that we are a new creation in Christ according to II Corinthians 5:17, but we in the Western world often interpret this individualistically. We overlook the fact that we are now part of a new household that includes people who are incredibly different than ourselves. From this group of diverse people, God is building a new community, a globally diverse household, a new humanity.

As stated in the previous section, being a follower of Jesus Christ means a new identity, a citizenship in heaven which supersedes all other citizenships, nationalities, or ethnic loyalties. "God's plan is not just that the gospel will go to all peoples, but that all peoples will be brought together through the gospel to form one people in Christ."²⁰⁴ Chris Sugden paints a great picture of the redeemed family of God in which he identifies both the need for and submission of our ethnic identities: The universality of the gospel, which relativizes all other definitions of identity and claims to loyalty, does not replace or suppress people's identity; neither is it a recipe for uniformity. It is meant to create a community marked by a mutuality of relationship where people have to find their identity in partnership with people who are different from them.²⁰⁵

This unity in diversity marks a Christian community where ethnic worldviews have been transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Reflecting back to the Lukan emphasis on the fullness of the Holy Spirit as

²⁰⁴ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 157.

²⁰⁵ Chris Sugden, "God and the Nations" in Patrick Benson, ed., *The Church and the Nations* (EFAC Bulletin, 47, 1996), 4.

a key to multi-ethnic inclusion in the Body of Christ, Hays goes even further, noting that existing racisms may indicate a conspicuous absence of the Holy Spirit:

As a pattern of true discipleship, Luke reminds the Church today that the gospel demands that we forsake our inherited culturally driven racial prejudices, and accept all people, especially those different from us as integral parts of the Church. The demolishing of racial barriers within the Church is a task in which the Spirit leads us. ***I would also suggest that the inverse is true: flourishing racial prejudice within a church is probably indicative of the Spirit's absence*** (emphasis mine).²⁰⁶

Hays' point is easy to give assent to but tough to implement because we sit today in churches that may be ethnically mono-cultural – either because of historical racism or (often) because of an ecclesiological passivity in growing multi-ethnic churches. The church has been lazy in purposefully, intentionally working to develop concrete ways to discover the unity-in-diversity that Christ wants in the church without fostering “tokenism” by forcing diversity in artificial ways. Note that he insists that the Holy Spirit's presence works to demolish racial barriers, not race or ethnicity itself. Churches that aspire to homogenous conformity to the dominant ethnicity or culture of the church miss the point of Christ's reconciling death as much as those practicing separatism or racism.

²⁰⁶ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 179.

Jesus did not come to make us all the same. He came to make us all family.

Historical Images Related to the New Humanity

Five brief historical allusions help remind us what we're after. The first two are positive, but the last three illustrate the church's historical inability to create a cross-cultural community of equals.

On the positive side of history, we have William Carey's multi-ethnic church in Serampore. This was a multi-cultural church that created, in effect, a new humanity and, in the words of Timothy Tennent, "looked strange and foreign to anybody there." A multi-cultural fellowship will include everyone trying to bring the richness of their culture to the family, but everyone will also be a little "off-balance" because no one fits completely. This church grew out of Carey's own vision of the new humanity that God was building – in contrast to the ethnically-dominated and caste-driven culture of India.

His 1804 "Covenant of Agreement" gave evidence to Carey's multi-racial understanding of the church and the mission of the church. In this 10-point covenant, Carey emphasized "the infinite value of immortal souls," the desire to esteem and treat Indians as equals and the prioritizing of the missionary obligation on the Indians, since Indians can win India for Christ. Though he and his European co-workers had a

difficulty in implementing their ideals, the document sets Carey apart from the superiority attitudes of other colonizers.²⁰⁷

A second illustration of the new humanity comes from Philip Jenkins discussion of the Latin American concept of “mixedness” (*mestizaje*). The development and use of this term offer a powerful analogy to the new humanity pictured in Ephesians 2. Jenkins observes that Hispanic theology has been shaped by the historic social inequalities of the Latin countries. As a result, issues of liberation, suffering, and social justice are critical concerns, as well as the matter of race:

Some of the most active thinkers have been Latinos based in North America, and a key concept in these circles is that of *mestizaje*, “mixedness,” the status of being a *mestizo* or mixed blood. In contemporary theology, *mestizaje* is so critical because it transcends traditional racial hierarchies. It comes closer to the New Testament goal of a society without racial privilege or domination, in which there is either Jew nor Greek, Latino or Anglo. And while mixed race people were traditionally marginalized and despised, newer theologians see this status as uniquely privileged.²⁰⁸

Jenkins continues, offering a powerful analogy of the biblical imagery in Ephesians 2 (see below), where different peoples come

²⁰⁷ http://www.churchplantingvillage.net/atf/cf/%7B087EF6B4-D6E5-4BBF-BED1-983D360F394%7D/Summary_of_Covenant_Agreement_for_Church_Planting_Team.doc

²⁰⁸ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: the Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 116.

together and bring their differences under Christ, and, in the process, form a new humanity.

Mestizaje allows a society to draw equally on its diverse cultural inheritances. The *mestizo* affirms both the identities received while offering something new to both. ... It is a potent theology for a world of deracinated migrants and wanderers.²⁰⁹

The third example (cited earlier) is more negative. After the Edict of Milan, the Donatist Controversy welcomed back those who had denied Christ. This welcome, however, was racially driven and based on ethnicity. Latin-speaking peoples were welcomed back; Berber Christians from North Africa were not. Those from North Africa were reduced to second-class citizenship, thus setting the foundation for the demise of the North African church.²¹⁰

A fourth example, again negative, came as the precursor to the grace-redeemed analogy of the *mestizaje* cited above. When Jesuits came to Latin America in the 16th century, they came with a multi-racial dream of “utopia” influenced more by Thomas More than by the biblical teaching of Ephesians. Their dream of creating a new civilization in Latin America by intermarrying the Spaniards with the indigenous peoples resulted in many abuses of human dignity and cultural uniqueness.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ LaTourette, *A History of Christianity*, 139.

²¹¹ Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 116.

Finally, one implicitly negative result of unredeemed perspective on “all peoples” has been the recent historical pattern of evangelicals sending single woman missionaries. These women, who would never be allowed to teach or lead in their sending churches (because they are women), went to lead and plant churches in foreign countries. The theological perspective belied a racist assumption – namely that when they went overseas to these new races, it was the equivalent to teaching children.²¹²

***The Vision of Biblical Reconciliation through the Cross of Christ:
New Creations in a New Humanity***

The 4th International Conference of the International Fellowship of Missions Theologians (meeting in Osijek, Croatia in 1991) crafted a document that sets the tone in this section for what we are looking for in our understanding of the united diversity of the Body of Christ. These theologians affirmed the following under the heading, “Ethnic Identities and Christian Peoplehood:”

Ethnic diversity is part of God’s creativity and it is God’s plan for all creation to glorify him. Therefore the riches of ethnic variety can be affirmed where it gives glory to God.²¹³

²¹² See Ruth Tucker, “Women in Mission,” in James M. Phillips, and Robert T. Coote, eds., *Toward the Twenty-first Century in Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

²¹³ “Freedom and Justice in Church-State Relationships,” in *Transformation* (July/September, 1991), 3.

They go on to describe how this fits into the biblical teaching on the new humanity created in Christ:

God's creative and redemptive intention is for all peoples to become part of the people of God. This purpose, however, is hindered by human fallenness, as a result of which ethnicity tends to be absolutized and thereby is distorted into idolatrous ethnocentrism. God's redemptive work dethrones all idolatries and therefore when a person becomes a member of the people of God through Christ, a new identity is received.²¹⁴

They go on to direct us to a balanced respect for ethnicity and culture all brought together under Christ. Their observations of this new humanity have great bearing on the evaluation of missiological concepts like the homogeneous unit principle. This new identity that has been "relativized" under our being first "in Christ" negates neither ethnicity nor its cultural expression. But they underscore that:

Citizenship in the Kingdom of God is the only absolute, non-negotiable identity for the Christian, besides which all other levels of identity are mobile and may be freely affirmed or laid aside for the sake of the Gospel... The Gospel affirms ethnic identity by enabling the Christian to rejoice in it for its intrinsic created

²¹⁴ Ibid.

goodness, to subordinate it to the Lordship of Christ, and to use it for the service of God and the neighbor.²¹⁵

They conclude with a wonderfully crafted image of the new humanity that stands together, united in our diversity under the cross of Christ:

The church, therefore, includes all ethnic groups, is a sign of God's multi-ethnic people and kingdom. It should affirm healthy ethnicity and the positive values of nationhood where these do not either become idolatrous towards God or oppressive towards fellow human beings²¹⁶ (emphasis mine).

Many of the authors of this statement, including Peter Kuzmic of Croatia, understood the problem of nationalizing the church (Croatian Catholicism versus Serbian Orthodoxy, for example), so the statement goes on to challenge the church to stand up against governments that manipulate ethnicities and practice ethnic idolatry that results in oppression, exploitation, discrimination, and ethnic cleansing.

The statement calls the church to assist in the protection and recovery of the human rights of ethnic groups that have been oppressed: "In such contexts, it is superficial to deal with ethnicity questions without regard to issues of social, economic, and political freedom and justice."²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

These authors remind us three things about our pursuit of this new humanity in Christ. First, they remind us that the church must affirm the ethnic identity and cultural perspectives brought by each member and every people group. “Adjectivizing” or hyphenating our Christian faith (“Serbian Orthodox,” “Croatian Catholic,” “African-Christianity,” “Asian-Theology,” etc.) often serve to create the very barriers that Jesus died to destroy.²¹⁸

Second, they rebuke ethnocentrism, or what they call “ethnic idolatry,” especially in regard to the use of ethnic superiority to oppress others. And finally, they remind us that the theological affirmation of being one new humanity in Christ has sociological implications; we cannot claim to affirm “oneness” with people if we do not simultaneously agree to stand for their justice and care.

Panta ta Ethne: Missiological Target and Fellowship Goal

The phrase *panta ta ethne*²¹⁹ has most often been applied to the sense of the “target” – the ethnically diverse people we are trying to reach.²²⁰ But does it apply to just the target of our discipleship? Or is discipleship not completed until we find all nations in our fellowship? Has

²¹⁸ I write these words with caution because it is always easier to criticize someone else for putting their adjective on Christian faith without realizing first that I might be calling affirming something as purely Christian, when in reality my perspectives have been biased by my own cultural background. See above on the need for “glocal” theology (footnote 56).

²¹⁹ Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20; Luke 24:47.

²²⁰ See Appendix 3.

the church “from every nation to every nation” always been the intent of God? Is Acts 13 the prototypical missional church? If so, we must evaluate the meaning of *panta ta ethne* for the senders as well as the recipients.

Specific passages in Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians set the tone for evaluating what the community of new creations – individuals – are supposed to look like in the new community – the household of faith.

Galatians 3:28-29 illustrates a dramatic transformation in the family of Christ. Put in its historical context, the inclusive language appears both as a radical testimony of Paul the Pharisee’s cultural conversion in Christ and as a rebuke to the Judaizers who desired to maintain Jewish culture as a prerequisite for salvation.²²¹ The passage is a testimony of the totally transformed worldview which should be the goal for every follower of Christ, a worldview that sees every “Other” as an equal so that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.” Daniel Hays points to the fact that in these three groupings, Paul is attacking ...three of the major barrier-forming divisions in human society.... ethnicity, economic capacity, and sexuality. The result is a radically reshaped social world order as viewed from a Christian perspective. Thus

²²¹ William Barclay reminds us that the Pharisees had the concept of “my identity at your expense” perfected. Commenting on Paul’s transformation in his perspective in Galatians 3:28-29, Barclay observes, “There is something of very great interest here. In the Jewish morning prayer, which Paul must all his pre-Christian life have used, the Jew thanks God that ‘Thou hast not made me a Gentile, a slave or a woman.’ Paul takes that prayer and reverses it. The old distinctions were gone; all were one in Christ” (William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Louisville, KY: The Westminster Press, 1976), 32-33).

... the body of Christ is an egalitarian body with universal scope where social, sexual, and ethnic differences do not determine entrance or status and are not the basis of unity and cohesion of the group.²²²

Taking the application to the church today, R. B. Hays stresses the issue of identity that emerges from this passage. He notes that there are some groups within the Church that seek to define identity on the basis of race or national origin. He suggests, "Such movements are the contemporary analogies of the 'circumcision party' within the early church, against which Paul so passionately fought."²²³ He goes on to challenge Christians: "Paul's passionate rejection of this kind of ethnic/religious 'identity politics' should lead us to reflect carefully on the ground of our own identity. To what extent is our sense of who we are grounded in the gospel of Christ, and to what extent is it determined by other factors?"²²⁴

Galatians egalitarian vision of the family of Christ speaks directly to believers all around the world in locations where ethnic tensions and ethnic prejudices from within the culture are pressuring Christians to embrace the same ethnic prejudices within the Church.

Ephesians gives the detail for the vision of the church that Paul expresses in Galatians 3:28-29. The new humanity emphasis begins when in Ephesians 1:5, Paul introduces us to a letter referring to

²²² Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 185-186.

²²³ R. Hays, "The Letter to the Galatians" in L.E. Keck, ed., *The New Interpreters Bible* (Nashville, Abingdon, 2000), 274.

²²⁴ Ibid.

“outsiders” or “Others” being “adopted” into a new family. Paul writes that God’s purposes in the Church and in Christ is to “bring all things together under one head” namely Jesus Christ.²²⁵

After describing God’s work of saving us by grace through faith, Paul then transitions into a description of this uniting work of Christ. He describes²²⁶ Jesus as our peace, making two into one, destroying the “barriers” that once divided us and taking down the “dividing wall of hostility.” How does Jesus do this? His death on the cross abolished the Law. In other words, the very thing that distinguished the Jew from the Gentile – the Mosaic Law – was abolished through Christ’s obedience, death, and resurrection. He did this so that he could create one new humanity out of the two.

As a result, insiders and outsiders are both reconciled through the cross. Together we become (through Christ’s obedience and death):

- Fellow citizens.
- Members of God’s household.
- A holy temple.²²⁷
- A spirit-filled dwelling.

²²⁵ Ephesians 1:10, 22.

²²⁶ Ephesians 2:14ff.

²²⁷ Christopher Wright points out that even the word “temple” was chosen by Paul to “emphasize the total inclusion of Gentiles within the identity of the Israel of God.” Wright, *The Mission of God*, 528.

What does this new humanity look like? How does Ephesians 2 get lived out in the church and its local expressions? Walls asserts that the message of Ephesians did not allow for culturally distinct communities (i.e., church-plants designed for one specific ethnic group) but rather a new building where differing factions are united: “Emphatically, there was to be only ONE Christian community.”²²⁸ What does this mean in multi-lingual cultural settings like urban centers? In mono-cultural, mono-lingual rural settings? And in centers of cultural hostility – where brothers and sisters in Christ try to come together as one in Christ, but in so doing alienate both sides (like Jewish and Palestinian believers coming together)?²²⁹

The specifics need to be decided by leaders in a specific context. The foundation of any decision, however, must conform somehow to God’s ideal for the united-in-diversity church of Jesus Christ described in Ephesians. And any ethnic separation that remains must be functional (linguistic, for example) rather than ideological.

To get a full picture of the radical nature of the new humanity God wants for us in the church, we return to Ephesians text. The historical background vividly portrays the challenge of creating a truly multi-cultural

²²⁸ Walls, “Ephesian Moment,” 76.

²²⁹ These questions obviously challenge the well accepted practices of planting churches according to ethnically-defined people groups or some other type of “homogeneous unit.” I will address this in the theological summary at the end of this chapter.

church where ethnicity is affirmed, but ethnocentrism is suppressed under our unity in Christ.

Ephesians 2:11-22 reminds us of the intense ethnic hatred of the Jews for the Gentiles. The Jews considered them outsiders to the covenant of God and socially undesirable. Their very physical attribute of being “uncircumcised” became a symbol of people who were second class and unclean. According to William Barclay, the Jews’ contempt for the Gentiles stemmed from their belief that the Gentiles were created to fuel the fires of hell. These separatist Jews believed that God loved only Israel. Barclay continues:

It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile woman in childbirth, for that would be to bring another Gentile into the world. The barrier between Jew and Gentile was absolute. If a Jew married a Gentile, the funeral of that Jew was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death; even to go into a Gentile house rendered a Jew unclean.²³⁰

Ephesians 2:14 describes the work of Christ, “who made the two one and has destroyed the barrier.” This barrier is obviously a reference to the middle wall between the courts of the temple being torn down. Barclay explains the layout of the temple to further elaborate on Paul’s point:

The Temple consisted of a series of courts, each one a little higher than the one that went before, with the Temple itself in the inmost

²³⁰ Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 107.

of the courts. First there was the Court of the Gentiles; then the Court of the Women; then the Court of the Israelites; then the Court of the Priests; and finally the Holy Place itself. Only into the first of them could a Gentile come. Between it and the Court of the Women there was a wall, or rather a kind of screen of marble, beautifully wrought, and let into it at intervals were tablets which announced that if a Gentile proceeded any farther he was liable to instant death.²³¹

So Jesus Christ brings separated peoples together – first into fellowship with God (with whom we were once at enmity (see Ephesians 2:1-10)), and then into fellowship with each other, even old enemies. It is a powerful image of former enemies being reconciled, of feelings of hatred and vengeance being destroyed, and of the cycles of violence coming to an end. Jesus death on the cross confronts our racism, our ethnocentricity, and our historical hatreds. We can now be delivered from the temptation...

...to create enemies or to foster new fantasies about our already existing enemies so that we can feel better about ourselves. *Most decisively we are called to love enemies because that is what we have experienced as the enemies of God – a love that is capable of transforming enemies into friends*²³² (emphasis mine).

²³¹ Ibid., 111-112.

²³² L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 263.

Rene Padilla enlarges our vision of this passage when he writes of Jesus himself as the peace-maker who brings divided people together:

The messianic peace, Shalom, wrought by Jesus Christ involves not only a new relationship to God but also a relationship between man and his neighbor. Shalom is not a gift that the Lord gives apart from himself; rather, he himself is Shalom (Eph. 2:14), and through his death he has brought all hostility among men to an end.²³³

When Paul writes, “to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace” (Ephesians 2:15), he uses a word for “new” (*kainos*) that means “something unique, the first of its kind.” What Jesus has created is not merely new (*neos*), “as in something that is new simply in point of time; a thing which is *neos* has come into existence recently, but there may well have been thousands of the same things in existence before.”²³⁴ Instead, this new humanity is *kainos*; Jesus’ reconciling death “has brought into the world a new quality of thing which did not exist before.”²³⁵

The conclusion? Peace with God through Jesus Christ implies that we will then transfer this peace into our human relationships – no matter how diverse we are from each other. “The unity in Christ produces

²³³ Rene Padilla, *Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 75.

²³⁴ Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 116.

²³⁵ Ibid.

Christians whose Christianity transcends all their local and racial difference; it produces men who are friends with each other because they are friends with God; it produces men who are one because they meet in the presence of God to whom they all have access.”²³⁶

Ephesians 2:19 describes the new humanity that God is creating in the church. Paul describes us as coming together from all of our diverse backgrounds and being built together as “members of God’s household” (*oikos*). The word *oikos* connotes the intimacy of immediate or extended family and household. Paul uses it to cite the inclusion of non-Jews in God’s loving purposes. To drive the point home, Paul uses two vivid pictures. First, he says that the Gentiles are “no longer foreigners” but full members of the family of God. The word Paul uses for foreigner (*xenos*) describes the outsider who was mistreated, spurned and treated with suspicion and dislike. Second, Paul uses the word sojourner (*paroikos*), a term that described a resident alien who paid a tax to inhabit land that was not nor could ever be his own. These terms describes the Gentiles as what we would call today the “marginalized.”²³⁷

In contrast to the language of marginalization, Paul says to the Gentiles: “You are no longer among God’s people on sufferance. You are full members of the family of God.” We may put this very simply; it is through Jesus that we are at home with God.²³⁸

²³⁶ Ibid., 117.

²³⁷ Ibid.

Summarizing this entire Ephesian passage, we observe that through Jesus Christ, Jew and Gentile are brought together into "one body." The reconciling work of Jesus Christ destroys the barrier and breaks down the dividing wall of hostility. In Christ, we are one body, "one new humanity." How? "Through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."²³⁹ Howard Snyder sees this passage as a summary of our need to understand both the vertical *and* horizontal nature of salvation

Note the two dimensions here. Jewish and Gentile believers are reconciled both to God and to each other. They have joined in a reconciling relationship to Jesus that transcends and destroys their old hostility toward each other. No longer enemies, they are now brothers and sisters.²⁴⁰

This is the amazing power of the redeeming plan of God in Christ! In Christ, hatred can be overcome. People who for generations lived with hostility towards each other can now become "heirs together" and "members of one body." Following on this observation, Andrew Walls writes:

Old believers and new believers, Jewish believers who had seen the salvation of Israel and Hellenistic ex-pagans who now

²³⁸ Ibid., 118.

²³⁹ Ephesians 2:14-16.

²⁴⁰ Howard A. Snyder, *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1977), 54-55.

worshiped *Kyrios Iesous* were part of a single, functioning organic life system. And this was because they were 'in Christ.'²⁴¹

This vertical and horizontal element of salvation sets a new standard for the church in terms of growing into a level of maturity that Paul refers to in Ephesians 4:13 as "the very height of Christ's full stature." Andrew Walls elaborates: "The very height of Christ's full stature is reached only by the coming together of the different cultural entities into the body of Christ. Only 'together,' not on our own, can we reach his full stature."²⁴²

Colossians 3:11²⁴³ teaches that all reasons for racial or ethnic or economic barriers are destroyed for those who have "put on the new self" as they set their minds on heavenly things. Ethnic biases must be crucified just as we crucify sexual immorality. Love must unite us together because we stand together as forgiven sinners.²⁴⁴

Hays underscores the context of Colossians 3:11 as the concluding comment on verses 5 to 10:

In that section Paul is describing the things from the old life that the new believers are to "put off:" that is, discard or abolish. Thus the call for destroying barriers is presented in the context of exhorting

²⁴¹ Walls, "Ephesian Moment," 77.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."

²⁴⁴ Colossians 3:2, 10, 12, 13-14.

believers to leave their old ways of the world and move to the new ways of Christ.²⁴⁵

Unlike the contemporary church, where we tend to separate the sins of the spirit (anger, malice, greed etc.) and the sins of the flesh (sexual impurity, lust, filthy language, etc.) from sins like racism, ethnocentrism, or partiality, Paul unites all of the sins together as attitudes and behaviors that are to be replaced with compassion, gentleness, and other fruit of the Spirit. “Racial prejudices and divisions belong to the old man... As we become the new humanity, these attitudes – along with anger, rage, slander, and the rest – must be abandoned.”²⁴⁶

Paul continues in Colossians and reminds his readers that being ruled by the peace of Christ as members of one body²⁴⁷ comes as divisions are abolished. Typical barriers that prevent human beings from accepting each other are broken down in Christ.

1) *Ethnicity and nationality*: in the body of Christ there is “neither Greek nor Jew.” “Men of different nationalities, who would have leaped at each other's throats, sat in peace beside each other at the Table of the Lord.”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 189.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Colossians 3:15.

²⁴⁸ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Louisville, KY: The Westminster Press, 1975), 156. Kirk illustrates this unity another way; he writes, “When an indigenous Christian leader from northern Argentina was asked what the Gospel had done for his people, he replied that it had enabled them to look the white person fully in the eye” (Kirk, *What Is Mission?*, 71).

- 2) *Religious backgrounds*: neither “circumcised nor uncircumcised.” “To a Jew a man of any other nation was unclean; when he became a Christian, every man of every nation became a brother.”²⁴⁹
- 3) *Cultured versus uncultured*: neither “barbarian nor Scythian.” “The uncultured and the cultured came together in the Christian Church. The greatest scholar in the world and the simplest son of toil can sit in perfect fellowship in the Church of Christ.”²⁵⁰
- 4) *Class and race*: “neither slave nor free.” “... in the Early Church it could, and did, happen that the slave was the leader of the Church and the master the humble member. In the presence of God the social distinctions of the world become irrelevant.”²⁵¹

In the church, through the reconciling death of Christ on the cross, irreconcilable entities are brought together. Dividing walls of interracial and interethnic hostilities are broken down, and God is at work creating a new community, diverse with all of the cultural mix that every member brings, yet united because Christ has died to defeat our ethnocentricity. This multi-ethnic, egalitarian community becomes the foundation for our mission to “all nations.”

²⁴⁹ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 156.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

UNITED DIVERSITY AS A FOUNDATION FOR MISSION

The Great Commission mandates (as a reflection to the church of the Abrahamic Covenant) send us outward into all the diverse peoples on earth, but this mission is most effective when those who go are themselves an expression of the answer to Jesus' prayer for unity in diversity.²⁵²

An often neglected "mission" passage occurs in the high priestly prayer of Jesus. When praying for his disciples and those who would come after them, Jesus twice connects the unity of the Body of Christ with "that the world may know."²⁵³

Even those who do evaluate this passage as an essential foundation for global mission usually do so only in regards to theological unity, urging a sort of evangelical ecumenism for the purposes of fulfilling the Great Commission.

While the passage can certainly be interpreted as Jesus call for unity in the essential doctrines related to salvation and diversity in the non-essentials, such an interpretation is too narrow. Erasmus asserted that the book of Acts demonstrated to the way the early church saw themselves fulfilling the mandates of Jesus.²⁵⁴ If this assertion is correct, then the unity Jesus prayed for must likewise be connected to the racial

²⁵² See John 17.

²⁵³ John 17:21, 23.

²⁵⁴ Cited in John Jefferson Davis, "'Teaching Them to Observe All that I Have Commanded You' – The History of the Interpretation of the 'Great Commission' and Implications for Marketplace Ministries," *Evangelical Review of Theology* (January, 2001).

and ethnic unity of the church – expanding outward across historical and ethnic barriers, to Samaritans, Africans, and other Gentiles.

The implication, therefore, of Jesus high priestly prayer extends beyond theological unity in diversity. It also calls us to ethnic and racial united diversity as a foundation for mission. We have already seen the example of the Antioch church as a model for mission coming from a church that was itself united in its ethnic and international diversity.

Andrew Kirk connects the passages studied earlier – Ephesians 2:14-22 and Colossians 3:11 – with the witness of the church in the world. The fact that in Christ we are redeemed so as to end our hostility towards one another and so as to reconcile us into a new community calls us to “submit our identity” and “forgo our ambitions” for the sake of the common goal – joining together in the mission of God. This is why diverse Christians on mission together...

... is both a threat and antidote to nationalisms of all kinds – imagine the radical consequences if the Church took seriously, across all cultural and ethnic boundaries, the command, “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21)²⁵⁵ (emphasis mine).

Contributing to this discussion, Philippians 3:20 reminds us that our true citizenship is in heaven. Colossians 3:2 establishes the basis for multi-cultural fellowship by urging us to set our mind on things above.

²⁵⁵ Kirk, *What Is Mission?*, 35.

When we come into the family of Christ, we submit our ethnicity and heritage to something greater – the purposes of the eternal Kingdom of Christ.

Together with diverse people we are on a mission, but we are together as people who have become “foreigners.” Miroslav Volf says that to be a child of Abram means exodus, voyage, pilgrimage, being a stranger: “at the core of Christian identity lies an all-encompassing change of loyalty... departure is part and parcel of Christian identity.”²⁵⁶

Our faith in Christ gives us a new first nationality: we are citizens of the Kingdom:

... fundamentally, Christianity is not a territorial religion. The city Christians seek, and the home to which they aspire, is neither a geographical nor a political destination. Curiously, this has enabled Christians to be at home, to be resident aliens, in all sorts of ethnic, linguistic, and political situations; and the translation of the Bible into hundreds of languages has encouraged local forms of Christianity to become deeply rooted in local cultures, while still remaining part of the universal Christian movement.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 40.

²⁵⁷ Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 152.

Missiological Implications of United Diversity

This principle – ethnic and racial united diversity as a foundation for mission – has significant implications in the way we carry the mission of God.

First, it calls us to build for intentional diversity in sending churches.

As Tim Dearborn asserts (cited earlier), “the church will have global credibility only to the extent that it has local diversity.”²⁵⁸ If we from the West, for example, hope to go to Nigeria to encourage Yoruba Christians to get along with Ibo Christians, they will look at the churches that have sent us and ask, “How can you – living in an ecclesiological system that still is dominated by racially divided churches – teach us?”

Second, ethnic and racial united diversity as a foundation for mission will call into question many of the assumptions of the “Three Self” movement. Although this movement has succeeded in releasing indigenous churches from Western domination and financial control, it is in part contrary to the biblical ideal of inter-dependence reflected in Jesus high priestly prayer. The “Three Self” movement exalts autonomy at the expense of inter-dependence, and only with mutual interdependence can we affirm ethnic specificity while combating ethnocentrism.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ Stackhouse, Dearborn, and Paeth, eds., *The Local Church in a Global Era*, 213.

²⁵⁹ See the section on the Three Self movement at the end of this chapter.

*Finally, ethnic and racial united diversity as a foundation for mission will call into question the homogenous unit principle.*²⁶⁰ Although this principle of church planting accurately describes the way that people behave and respond, we need to ask if it falls short of the biblical ideal. If the church at Antioch had followed the homogeneous unit principle for church planting, Simeon of Niger would have started his own church. The homogeneous unit principle supports a separate church for Greeks, for Jews, for Scythians, and for barbarians. The Bible affirms a very different goal of bringing diverse people together under one Lord, Jesus Christ.

OUR ETHNICALLY DIVERSE ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE

“Far from being a small place only for a chosen few, the redeemed city can accommodate all peoples of the world, with room to spare.”²⁶¹ While we work today for the experience of the truly united yet truly ethnically diverse expression of the Body of Christ (submitting all of our ethnocentric tendencies to him), we realize that this is indeed a “moment”, a foreshadowing of the ultimate fulfillment of Revelation 7:9, when the multitude that no one can count – from every nation, tribe, people and language – gather in heavenly worship of Jesus Christ who saves them all.

²⁶⁰ See the section on the Homogeneous Unit Principle at the end of this chapter.

²⁶¹ Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 268.

John's great eschatological cross-cultural vision²⁶² provides us with our long-term source of hope. Although our efforts at affirming ethnicity and combating ethnocentrism may be imperfect on this side of eternity, we know that we are working towards a goal that God himself will ultimately bring together the diverse people of the worshippers of Christ in perfect harmony.

It is important to note that the delineations of the world in John's visions – "tribe, language, people, and nation" in Revelation 5:9 and "nation, tribe, people and language" in Revelation 7:9 – ultimately take us back to Genesis 10 and the Table of the Nations. At the time of the account of Babel, the population of the world was defined and described by a fourfold formula: according to families, languages, lands, and nations.²⁶³ In the Septuagint, the terms for each are *phyle* (family), *glossa* (language), *chora* (territory), and *ethne* (nation). The categories factor into the Abrahamic promise in Genesis 12:3 and 18:18. The former states that in Abraham "all the families [*phyle*] of the earth will be blessed" and the latter states that in Abraham "all nations [*ethne*] on earth will be blessed."²⁶⁴

Why is this important? It shows us that the anthro-centric global unity that humankind aspired towards which led to God's wrath at the Tower of Babel has now been fulfilled by God, but in Christo-centric united

²⁶² Most notably Revelation 5:9 and 7:9.

²⁶³ Genesis 10:20, 31; 10:5 uses the same terms, but in different order.

²⁶⁴ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 195.

diversity. Cultural distinctions are preserved by people brought together because Jesus Christ, through his sacrificial death, has purchased them for God.

The fourfold formula (tribe, language, people, and nation) occurs throughout Revelation, playing an important role in the book. It occurs seven times (5:9, 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, 17:15), and the sequence order of the four terms is different each time.²⁶⁵

Will there be Culture in Heaven?

These tribe-language-people-nation texts provoke the obvious question, “Will there be cultural distinctives in heaven?” Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 affirm with certainty that there was something about the people John saw in his vision that distinguished them one from another. We know that they were linguistically different, but the texts imply the potential of differences of dress, skin color, physical features, even worship styles.

Donald R. Jacobs, writing regarding Revelation 7:9 observes that: “The gospel is very clear with regard to ethnicity. The KINGDOM OF GOD is not a new generic culture, but a family that includes people from a great variety of cultures.”²⁶⁶ In other words, our unity in the Christian church transcends culture, yet it affirms all cultures. We are “one” in Christ

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 196. Hays notes, “In Revelation, four is the number of the world, seven is the number of completeness. The sevenfold use of this fourfold phrase indicates that reference is being made to all the nations of the world. In the symbolic world of Revelation, there could hardly be a more emphatic indication of universalism” (Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 196-197).

²⁶⁶ Jacobs, “Ethnicity,” 323.

because we love the same Lord and are redeemed by the one Lamb of God. Our unity means that we all bring our cultural framework, traditions and treasures (see below) into the Body, but no one culture dominates or dictates to another. “The culmination of world history will be when the followers of Christ will join the multiethnic choir-out of every tribe and nation and tongue, praising God forever and ever.”²⁶⁷

Peskett and Ramachandra observe that our heavenly culture involves not only the preservation of the “righteous deeds of the saints” but also the preservation of cultural wealth, “the *glory and the honor of the nations*.”²⁶⁸ In some way, heaven will preserve both cultural identity and particularity. Revelation 21:24-26 tells us that “the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it [the holy city that will be found on the new earth].” In some way, the best accomplishments of each nation and culture will serve to enrich life on the new earth. Hoekema points out that “there will be continuity as well as discontinuity between the present life and the life to come, and that therefore our cultural, scientific, educational, and political endeavors today help us to prepare for a fuller and richer life on the new earth.”²⁶⁹ While Hoekema’s post-millennial bias shines through

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Revelation 21:26. Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 270.

²⁶⁹ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 94-95.

his observation, he raises many wonderful questions about diversity in heaven.²⁷⁰

As we know it, culture is tainted by sin and perverted in the same way that the image of God in humankind has been tainted and perverted. As a result, we may have difficulty considering “culture” being present in heaven. Nevertheless, if God is the author and Creator of culture, the Johannine visions lead us to anticipate cultural diversity in its purest forms giving glory to God and inviting us to full participation in heaven. Imagine every delicious meal eaten in another cultural context, every stirring piece of music, every beautiful dance, and every other cross-culturally amazing statement of human diversity and creativity, and then realize that the heavenly worship service will be exponentially greater than any of these!

Contemporary Implications for the Church of John’s Vision

John’s vision of the multi-cultural people of God united in worship provokes several questions for the church in the “here and now.” *First, the vision gives us a standard to compare our fellowships against.* Daniel Hays puts it succinctly (though betraying again his narrow view that a Black-White relation is the only racial/ethnic issue facing the North American church):

We in the Church today need to ask ourselves the question as to why our earthly churches differ so much in composition from the

²⁷⁰ Richard Mouw offers a full treatment of these texts in Richard Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

congregations depicted in Revelation. If White churches in North American continue to maintain their ethnic exclusion of other races, particularly Black Americans, are they not clearly moving in a direction that is contrary to the portrayal that John gives us [referring to the description of the multi-cultural worship in Revelation 5:9; 7:9]?²⁷¹

We need to take the initial question a step further than just Black-White relations. Hispanics represent a higher percentage of the USA population than Blacks. Why is Spanish so seldom used in our Anglo churches? Asians represent one of the fastest growing segments of America. Are there Asians in our church leadership?

Obviously our answers will be in part affected by the demographics that surround our particular churches, but evaluating our churches against the Johannine vision will at least remind us that heaven will NOT be made up of multitudes of people who look just like us.

Second, John's vision reminds us that we are part of the global family of God. The church today is predominantly non-white and non-Western. Spring off of the visions recorded in Revelation, Miriam Adeney exhorts us to embrace diversity "so that we may feel at home in God's future."²⁷² Hays similarly reminds us that the true "body of Christ" and "the people of God" is *not* a predominantly White congregation! "Christians

²⁷¹ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 199.

²⁷² Miriam Adeney, "Think Globally, Love Locally," *Christianity Today* (October 22, 2001), 14-15.

who gather around the throne of God will rub shoulders with people of all races... The ultimate people of God, as portrayed in Revelation, are multi-ethnic, in fulfillment of God's original intention.²⁷³

John's vision serves as a biblical warning against ethnocentrism and cultural exclusivity:

The final reality of history, in biblical perspective, is of this new community of peoples from every cultural and racial background worshipping one God and one Savior through one Spirit (Ephesians 2:18, 22; Rev. 7:9ff). The implication of this vision is, first, that the Church dare not risk identifying itself too exclusively with any one culture or nation and, secondly, that one group of Christians may not create barriers against others by the exclusive use of cultural symbols, such as language.²⁷⁴

Just as we will know as we are fully known in heaven, so also we will experience the new humanity Jesus created by his death on the cross in its complete and unadulterated state.

BIBLICAL TEACHING IN SUMMARY

Evaluating the issues of culture, ethnicity, and diversity from a Scriptural overview, I have tried to affirm the following:

Creation: the Bible affirms that every human being is created in the image of God – equally, beautifully, and uniquely. As a result, we must

²⁷³ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 199.

²⁷⁴ Kirk, *What Is Mission?*, 79.

view every other person as an equal. To despise the “Other” – regardless of our myriad cultural or ethnic differences – is to despise our Creator.

Fall: Adam and Eve’s choice to sin broke multiple relationships – humanity with God, humanity with nature, humanity with each other, and human beings with themselves. The Fall led to the human loss of identity (or at least the loss of our security in our identity) and created the relational environment where we need to start establishing ourselves against the “Other.”

The Fall disconnects us with our Creator, so we enter into the world with a need to define our own identity, which we often do at the expense of another.

Redemption for all Nations: we recognize that culture and diversity is God’s creation and God’s design; therefore, every culture has something to teach us about God’s character. However, humans feared this diversity so they built the Tower of Babel to create a man-made unity. As a result, God dispersed people to create the diversity he intended. The church and Christians often react with the same fears of diversity.

From the Table of Nations, the call of Abram, and the election of Israel, and the New Testament Church, the Bible affirms that God’s redemptive plan is for all peoples, tribes, ethnicities, and nations. The failure to see “all peoples” as recipients of the redemptive invitation of God leads the people of God into unbiblical exclusivism. However, God witnesses throughout the Scriptures that he is Lord of the nations.

Reconciliation through the Cross of Christ: Jesus' sacrificial death was not only to reconcile us to God but to each other. God does not forgive us through Jesus so that we and our people experience the benefits of salvation alone. He reconciles us through the cross of Christ so that we can view all "Others" through the eyes of reconciliation. Our salvation "eyes" must look upward to the Lord who saves us, but they must also look outward so that we see all of those loved and redeemed by God – from all nations and peoples.

Disciples as New Creations in the New Humanity: we believe that we are a new creation in Christ according to II Corinthians 5:17, but we often interpret this individualistically. We overlook the fact that we are now part of a new household that includes people who are incredibly different than ourselves. From this group of diverse people, God is building a new community, a globally diverse household, a new humanity.

United Diversity as a Foundation for Mission: the Great Commission mandates (as a reflection to the church of the Abrahamic Covenant) send us outward into all the diverse peoples on earth, but this mission is most effective when those who go are themselves an expression of the answer to Jesus' prayer for unity in diversity in John 17.

Our Eschatological Hope: while we work today for the experience of the truly united yet truly ethnically diverse expression of the Body of Christ (submitting all of our ethnocentric tendencies to him), we realize that this is indeed a "moment", a foreshadowing of the ultimate fulfillment

of Revelation 7:9, when the multitude that no one can count – from every nation, tribe, people and language – gather in heavenly worship of Jesus Christ who saves them all.

The Ephesian Moment

Andrew Walls' is the person who has most prominently postulated that we are moving towards this Ephesian moment as part of the long-term outworking of salvation to the end of the age.²⁷⁵ If he is correct, then the tools we create as the application of this dissertation must help prepare multi-cultural leadership to embrace this reality.

In our day the Ephesian moment has come again, and come in a richer mode than has ever happened since the first century.

Developments over several centuries, reaching a climax in the twentieth, mean that we no longer have two, but innumerable, major cultures in the church.²⁷⁶

With innumerable major cultures in the church, how can we affirm the ethnic specificity of each person and group and yet combat the desire to exalt one group over another? In our journey, how do we avoid the two extremes of which Walls warns us?

On the one hand, how do we avoid the tendency of guarding our cultural version of the Christian faith and seeking to establish it as the norm (a version of theological ethnocentrism)? On the other hand, how do

²⁷⁵ Walls, "Ephesian Moment," 72.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 78.

we avoid a post-modern aversion to absolute Truth that validates every individual cultural expression but allows us to remain in isolation from each other (i.e., each has their own cultural meal, but there is no shared table)?

Finally, what will we do with the economic implications of all of this – given that economic might is a powerful but subtle way of exerting an ethnocentrism over others by requiring the submission of their culture through dependency relationships? Philip Jenkins asserts, “If we want to visualize a ‘typical’ contemporary Christian, we should think of a woman living in a village in Nigeria or in a Brazilian *favela*.”²⁷⁷ Walls picks up on this same theme, connecting the economic challenge to the Ephesian Moment:

The Ephesian moment also announces a church of the poor. Christianity will be mainly a religion of poor and very poor peoples, with few gifts to bring except the gospel itself, and the heartlands of the church will include some of the poorest countries on earth. A developed world in which Christians become less prominent will seek to protect its position against the rest. The Ephesian question at the Ephesian moment is whether or not the church in all of its diversity will demonstrate its unity by the interactive participation of all of its culture-specific segments, the interactive participation that is to be expected in a functioning body. Will the body of Christ be

²⁷⁷ Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 2.

realized or fractured in this new Ephesian moment? Realization will have both theological and economic consequences. Perhaps the African and Asian and Hispanic Christian *diasporas* in the West have a special significance in the posing of the Ephesian question, and the United States, with its large community of indigenous believers and growing Christian communities of the diasporas, may be crucial for the answer that will be given to it.²⁷⁸

THEOLOGICAL ISSUES, MISSIOLOGICAL PRACTICE

Reviewing the Scriptures from Genesis through Revelation carries with it a shortcoming; namely, that overarching theological themes might not emerge – especially the themes that relate to contemporary missiological or global trends. For the purposes of my investigation into the topic of ethnicity and ethnocentricity, three particular missiological issues deserve special attention: the “Three-Self” movement, the “Homogeneous Unit Principle,” and the issue of globalization as it affects the Church and the cultures of “all nations.”

How does our biblical survey help us evaluate the “Three-Self” movement? As stated earlier, the “Three-Self” movement has succeeded in releasing indigenous churches from Western leadership, domination, and financial control. In many respects, the “Three-Self” ideal (self-supporting, self-governing, and self propagating (or self-extending)) forced

²⁷⁸ Walls, “Ephesian Moment,” 81.

the “daughter churches” of Western-based missionaries into independence and maturity.²⁷⁹ Dependency was replaced with a spirit of self-sustaining responsibility and autonomy. Western-biased theology was modified according to the context of the localized Christians.²⁸⁰

The “Three-Self” or “indigenous church” thinking helped launch movements of indigenous churches in places like South Korea and Nigeria which in turn has developed these churches as some of the strongest new leaders in sending out cross-cultural missionaries.

But our biblical overview calls into question the spirit of independence in “Three Self” thinking which contradicts the biblical ideal of inter-dependence – reflected both in the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17 for unity and in the teaching of I Corinthians 12 regarding every member of the Body of Christ needing the other. If the “Three Self” movement exalts autonomy at the expense of inter-dependence, then it would seem to contradict the work of Christ on the cross to create one new humanity out of destructive diversity and separation. It is only with mutual interdependence that we can affirm ethnic specificity while combating ethnocentrism.

In this regard, it is worth noting two contemporary issues related to “Three Self” thinking. First, witness the cross-cultural problems

²⁷⁹ John Mark Terry, “Indigenous Churches,” in A. Scott Moreau, ed., *The Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 483-485.

²⁸⁰ The most influential people in shaping the Three-Self model were Henry Venn (1796-1873), Rufus Anderson (1796-1880), and John Nevius (1829-1893). All were writing during the peak of the so-called “Great Century” of European-dominated missions.

experienced by the Korean Church in the contemporary mission movement. The Korean church, which is arguably the greatest living testimony to the autonomous growth potential of the “Three Self” movement, has today one of the strongest missionary sending churches in the world. But across the world, they struggle with inter-cultural teamwork and behavior that is seen as culturally imperialistic by recipients. Why? At least one reason is that the “Three Self” foundation has not adequately prepared them for the inter-dependence reflected in Paul’s description of the church in Galatians, Ephesians, or Colossians.²⁸¹

A second example of the danger of “Three Self” thinking is the church in China. It is interesting to note that the Communist government generally endorses (even supports) “Three Self” churches. Why? The Chinese government understands that autonomous churches are easier to control or manipulate for their own purposes. A church with multi-national relationships and a sense of multi-cultural interdependence will connect with the larger world and possibly gain ideas and perspectives that a repressive government cannot control.

Perhaps the best way to evaluate the “Three Self” movement in contrast the biblical ideal of interdependence or one new humanity is to

²⁸¹ Reuben Ezemadu, our Development Associates International co-worker in Nigeria, argues that the Koreans have had more trouble with the effects of ethnocentricity on the way they do missions than the Nigerians because the Koreans come from one basic ethnicity. While he admits that Nigerians often struggle with a prideful superiority towards the people they are trying to reach, he thinks that Nigerians often do better because in order to be sent out, they often have to join with other Nigerian missionaries who are from other tribes. Reuben’s mission, Christian Mission Foundation, has more than 400 missionaries, but the missionaries themselves come from fourteen different ethnicities; they must be multi-culturally capable even before they are sent (from personal conversation with Reuben).

appeal to the overarching sovereignty of God in his long-term mission. Put simply, *the “Three Self” movement served as a corrective to Western dominated mission endeavors.*²⁸² Without this break from Western dominance, indigenous movements might never have sprung up, launching us towards that great Ephesian moment which Andrew Walls envisions. With the corrections made, however, all churches globally must now review “Three Self” ideals against the biblical standards of unity in diversity – so that we do not rebuild walls of cultural separation which Jesus died to destroy.

How does our biblical survey help us evaluate the

Homogeneous Unit Principle? Developing from Donald McGavran’s “people movement theory,” the Homogeneous Unit Principle has been one of the most influential streams of missiological thinking in the past sixty years. The idea that “people like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers”²⁸³ became the foundation for our contemporary understanding of “people group thinking.”²⁸⁴

²⁸² Note here that the promoters of the Three-Self movement were all writing in a period of Western dominated (often ethnocentric) missions which sometimes prevented the indigenous churches from developing. Even Roland Allen’s classic *Missionary Methods: St. Paul or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) was written in 1912 to encourage church planters to rely more on the Holy Spirit rather than on Western methodologies which made Western missionaries essential in the ongoing leadership of indigenous churches.

²⁸³ Donald McGavran, quoted by C. Peter Wagner, “Homogeneous Unit Principle, in A. Scott Moreau, ed., *The Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 455.

²⁸⁴ Hidden peoples, unreached peoples, and people-group thinking are terms popularized by Dr. Ralph Winter to describe the need to reach people where they were.

His teaching related to the Homogeneous Unit Principle²⁸⁵ observed that church-planting often progressed fastest when the church was made up of people that had key personal identifiers in common, which often resulted in churches that started (and often remained) monocultural. People were more attracted to a church where they found “our kind of people.”²⁸⁶ From his context of service, India, McGavran’s intent was never to foster racism or ethnocentrism but rather to promote opportunities for conversion amongst the difficult-to-reach higher castes of India as well as culture-bound Muslims.

The great theological and missiological issue raised by the Homogeneous Unit Principle and the idea of “people-group thinking” is summarized in this question: are we being *descriptive*²⁸⁷ in how people respond first to Christ (by finding Christ in the company of people with

²⁸⁵ See Donald McGavran, “The Dimensions of World Evangelism,” in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, edited by J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), Donald McGavran, “The Priority of Ethnicity” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, (Vol. 19, No. 1 (January 1983), 14-23, and most notably Donald McGavran, *The Bridges of God* (New York: Friendship Press, 1955).

²⁸⁶ “Our kind of people” is a phrase popularized by McGavran’s most prolific disciple, Peter Wagner, to describe the fact that church growth proceeded fastest when people found a fellowship of people with whom they “fit” – socially, ethnically, economically, etc.

²⁸⁷ The authors of the Lausanne Occasional Paper on the Homogeneous Unit Principle (<http://community.gospelcom.net/Brix?pageID=14290>, 2) stated their agreement with the fact that...

... the barriers to the acceptance of the gospel are often more sociological than theological; people reject the gospel not because they think it is false but because it strikes them as alien. They imagine that in order to become Christians they must renounce their own culture, lose their own identity, and betray their own people. Therefore, in order to reach them, not only should the evangelist be able to identify with them, and they with the evangelist; not only must the gospel be contextualized in such a way that it communicates with them; but the church into which they are invited must itself belong to their culture sufficiently for them to feel at home in it.

whom they feel comfortable)²⁸⁸ or are we being *prescriptive* in directing people to plant churches that can easily foster destructive and anti-biblical ethnocentrism?

Neither McGavran nor Winter nor other advocates of the Homogeneous Unit Principle have promoted the idea of racially divided churches which contradict the new humanity and cultural diversity goals of Ephesians 2 and Revelation 5:9, but the foundational ideas of Homogeneous Unit thinking have sometimes yielded unintended consequences. If the church starts and stays homogenous, those who choose to follow Christ may never have to wrestle with the “Other” or the horizontal effects of salvation.²⁸⁹

The reality that people are attracted to people with whom they have identity issues like culture or language will always be true this side of heaven. But we must be cautious not to stop there. In the ongoing challenge of affirming ethnicity and the dignity of all cultures, the church must also live with the tension of being God’s tangible expression on earth of unity-in-diversity which demonstrates to the world a new identity and security found primarily in Christ. That church must be a place where

²⁸⁸ Using the language of Andrew Walls, it seems that the Church finds it easier to foster the principle of “indigenization” (i.e., local cultural adaptation) of the Gospel and often resists the pilgrim principle (where we don’t fit, even with our own people). Two resources related to this struggle include Lesslie Newbigin, “The Cultural Captivity of Western Christianity,” *A Word in Season* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) and John Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000).

²⁸⁹ The same critique must be leveled against the highly individualized perspective of faith often promoted from the Western world view.

people “receive a new homogeneity, which transcends all others, for now they find their essential unity in Christ, rather than in culture.”²⁹⁰

Wherever the church of Jesus Christ exists and is maturing, there must be intentionality in the decision to grow beyond its current limitations. In the worlds of the Pasadena Consultation on the Homogeneous Unit Principle:

... in many situations a homogeneous unit church can be a legitimate and authentic church. Yet we are also agreed that it can never be complete in itself. Indeed, if it remains in isolation, it cannot reflect the universality and diversity of the Body of Christ. Nor can it grow into maturity. Therefore, every HU church must take active steps to broaden its fellowship in order to demonstrate visibly the unity and the variety of Christ's church. This will mean forging with other and different churches creative relationships which express the reality of Christian love, brotherhood, and interdependence.²⁹¹

How does our biblical survey help us to evaluate and respond to the issues of globalization? The meaning of the concept of globalization is debated on many fronts,²⁹² but the apparent point of

²⁹⁰ <http://community.gospelcom.net/Brix?pageID=14290>, 5.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 4.

²⁹² Peter Berger and Samuel Huntington, eds. *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) gives a wide, international perspective on the power and the unexpected consequences of globalization.

agreement is that we are living in an inter-connected world.²⁹³ Whether the focus is internet technology, international business, the expanded use of the English language, or the influence of Hollywood or Bollywood movies, the world has become for many of us²⁹⁴ the “global village” that McLuhan predicted in 1960.²⁹⁵ The development of the world into a “single place,”²⁹⁶ the coming of a “global age,”²⁹⁷ and the increased compression of time and space²⁹⁸ all factor into understandings of globalization. It relates to the migrations and inter-marrying of peoples (and the corresponding creation of new, blended ethnic identities), and it affects the development of intensified desires to preserve cultural and ethnic identity by resisting the influence of other dominant cultures.

²⁹³ Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1999) represents those who see the positive aspects of the unifying affects of globalization.

²⁹⁴ Opponents of globalization point often point out that the benefits of globalization are more often experienced by those who were wealthier to begin with. This is one of the reasons our African co-workers explain that “What you in the USA call ‘globalization,’ we in Africa call ‘Americanization.’” See Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003) as well as See Benjamin Barber, “Jihad vs. McWorld” and Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*.

²⁹⁵ The phrase that some argue launched the idea of globalization came from McLuhan and Carpenter in 1960: “Postliterate man's electronic media contract the world to a village or tribe where everything happens to everyone at the same time: everyone knows about, and therefore participates in, everything that is happening the minute it happens. *Television gives this quality of simultaneity to events in the global village.*” Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan, eds., *Explorations in Communication* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), vii.

²⁹⁶ Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1992).

²⁹⁷ Martin Albrow, *The Global Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

²⁹⁸ James H. Mittelman, *The Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 5-6.

For the purposes of this paper, I am synthesizing various aspects of these ideas and defining globalization as the growth of cross-cultural contacts through communication, migration, and travel as well as the diffusing of cultures because of interconnectedness between cultures, nations, and people as products, ideas, technology and practices influence the development of a world culture.

The reality of globalization must be taken into account when considering overall theological themes related to the topic of ethnicity and ethnocentricity for both positive and negative reasons. Positively, globalization has accelerated communication so that the Gospel message can be communicated faster and wider than ever before. The dramatic information explosion related has opened new doors for evangelism (using the internet in China or satellite television in the Middle East, for example), and accessibility to information has increased our knowledge of the Global Church.

In addition, globalization and urbanization have contributed to the migrations of many ethnic specific groups yielding four positive missiological and theological effects. First, the migrations of people means that more and more Christian fellowships live within the proximity of other Christians who may come from a totally different ethnic group or speak another language. Such proximity provides increased opportunity for multi-cultural worship and fellowship which can help local churches

experience a taste of the new humanity Jesus is creating out of our multiple cultures.

Second, the migrations of peoples also serves to bring ethnic groups that are presently unreached with the Gospel into the proximity of Christian fellowships which, with cross-cultural sensitivity and training, can present the Gospel to ethnic groups that have never heard it before.²⁹⁹

A related third potential missiological benefit of globalization is the migration of Christians into places where the Gospel needs to be proclaimed – like Christians from Caribbean island nations who are going to France, Pentecostal Brazilians coming to Boston, or evangelical Filipino domestic workers going to the Arabic-speaking world.³⁰⁰

Finally, globalization has brought us closer together with fellow believers who are thinking theologically in ways that expand our view of God and our understanding of the Scriptures.³⁰¹ The most positive impact of this internationalization of theological and missiological thinking will ultimately enlarge our hearts and minds.³⁰²

²⁹⁹ See Hanciles, "Mission and Migration: Some Implications for the Twentieth Century Church," 146-153.

³⁰⁰ See Luis Pantoja, Jr., Sadiri Joy Tira, and Enoch Wan, eds., *Scattered: the Filipino Global Presence* (Manila: Life Change Publishing, 2004).

³⁰¹ In this regard, see Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, eds., *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*; Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*; and Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., *Africa Bible Commentary*.

³⁰² Regarding global missiology, see William Taylor, ed., *Global Missiology for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

But globalization is not uniformly positive in our efforts to affirm the united-but-diverse Body of Christ or to reach those who have never heard the Gospel. Negatively, globalization has a tendency towards destroying cultures because urbanization and multi-national marketing schemes can tend to absorb cultures – especially minority cultures – so that people lose their ethnic distinction or are lost as marginalized people.³⁰³ Some react to this by affirming a radical “jihad” against globalization in an effort to keep from being absorbed,³⁰⁴ but others choose assimilation, and something uniquely given them from God in their culture is lost.

Globalization can also have a negative impact on the migration of peoples who have not yet heard the Gospel if they relocate to areas of the world they perceive as Christian and they are rejected, discriminated against, or oppressed. The hostile treatment received by some immigrating Muslims to Western Europe or North America remind us that the church sometimes behaves more in its own nationalistic interests over the interests of the Gospel.

While we talk freely of the globalization of the church or the globalization of the missionary force, the theological and missiological challenge of the years ahead will be to respond to the realities of

³⁰³ See James H. Mittelman, *The Globalization Syndrome*.

³⁰⁴ See Benjamin Barber, “Jihad vs. McWorld” (and Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*).

globalization with caution.³⁰⁵ We will need to affirm global trends that move us toward our “Ephesian moment” but resist those factors in globalization which serve to contradict the dignity of every person and culture created by God.

³⁰⁵ A helpful resource in this regard is Richard Tiplady, ed., *One World or Many? The Impact of Globalisation on Mission* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2003).

CHAPTER 4: REVIEWING APPROACHES TO THE TOPICS OF ETHNICITY AND ETHNOCENTRICITY

The topics of culture, ethnicity, and diversity cover a wide variety of material, approaches, and interpretations. Although I have limited myself primarily to resources written by professing Christian in some of the categories, I have tried to research a wide variety of authors – ranging from sociologists who believe that ethnicity is nothing more than a social construct invented to control people, to minority writers who view the entire world from a perspective of being oppressed. In order to try to establish some sense of order to my review of literature, I have identified key writings and authors in eight categories.

1) *Missiological silence related to ethnocentricity:* first, alluding to very significant literature in recent missiology, I will establish that though these issues are incredibly significant in our contemporary global Christian movement, much of the most cited literature has failed to address the issues – especially the issue of ethnic identity and where it fits in a Christian's view of self or the "Other."

2) *Ethnicity and theology:* in section two, I will briefly allude to literature that links ethnicity and theology – or how our ethnicity shapes the way we look at God.

3) *Ethnicity:* in section three, I will cite significant works related to the understanding of ethnicity in general.

4) *Ethnicity and identity*: section four will focus on the subject of ethnicity and identity.

5) *Ethnicity and ethnocentricity*: section five will examine literature related to ethnicity and ethnocentricity, especially as these issues provoke conflicts between peoples.

6) *Reconciliation*: I will follow the section on conflict with reference to resources related to reconciliation between divided peoples.

7) *Indigenous ethnicity issues*: section seven will evaluate resources related to ethnicity and localized issues of missiology, and then

8) *Intentionality*: I will conclude by discussing the publications most significant for my research purposes – those designed to take a more intentional approach towards building bridges between people of differing ethnicities.

MISSIOLOGICAL SILENCE RELATED TO ETHNOCENTRICITY

Given the historical evidence of ethnocentricity and how it has provoked everything from discrimination to oppression to war to genocide, missiological literature, especially preceding 1990, has remained rather silent on the issue. The literature seems to reflect that the issue of ethnic affirmation versus ethnocentric rebuke is typically passively ignored or actively tolerated in the church and in missiology. It may be that the ethnocentrically driven conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda in the early 1990's have awakened the need to address the subject, but the

relative silence on affirming ethnicity versus combating ethnocentricity helped provoke the research behind this dissertation.

This is not to say that contemporary missiological writing ignores the importance of affirming cultural specificity and uniqueness. The desire for “localized theologies” has served to advocate the development of indigenous theologies like “Indian Christian Theology” or “African Christian Theology” (see below related to indigenous ethnicity issues). But how does the Indian or African keep from repeating the same mistakes that the Western theologies are accused of – that of developing theology that is “ethnocentric” and implies his or her theology is superior? The answer to this question is in part reflected in some of the efforts to produce the “glocal” theology referred to earlier.

But the shortcoming remains: we need a missiology that addresses this issue clearly. How do we affirm the God-given distinctions of ethnic and cultural identity and yet rebuke ethnocentrism and the human tendency to assert superiority over others? In his article in the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* on “ethnicity,” Donald R. Jacobs, heads one of the sections: “*Needed: A Theology of Ethnicity.*” He writes:

Missiologists have developed theologies of “ethnic evangelism,” *but few missiologists are developing a theology of “ethnicity” itself.* This task is becoming increasingly urgent because the demands of

ethnicity will probably dominate the world's agenda at least in the opening decades of the new millennium (emphasis mine).³⁰⁶

Jacobs observes again: "So much interethnic hostility exists in the world today that the word itself [ethnicity] has begun to take on a negative meaning. This bodes ill for the opening decades of the twentieth century because ethnicity is on the rise."³⁰⁷

Dayton and Fraser similarly note the tension – ethnicity versus ethnocentrism – but also observe that the missiological issues have not yet been resolved:

There *is* a significant debate about the mono-ethnic (or mono-class, mono-language) churches resulting from people-oriented evangelization. The problem centers on the question of the legitimacy of indigeneity versus the imperative of the unity of the Church. We are not going to try to resolve the problem. *There is need for a more highly developed theology of culture and social structure before many of the issues can be settled* (emphasis mine).³⁰⁸

Is the Problem Being Addressed?

Jacobs' assertion that "few missiologists are developing a theology of ethnicity" itself rings true when one investigates some of the most basic

³⁰⁶ Jacobs, "Ethnicity," 323.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Dayton and Fraser, *Planning Strategies*, 130.

mission literature – especially texts dedicated to the “Introduction of Missiology.” Consider several examples of the omission of ethnicity and ethnocentrism in basic missiological texts:

David Bosch’s highly regarded classic, *Transforming Mission*³⁰⁹ is considered monumental in many of its insights into “Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission.” However, it fails to address the ethnicity versus ethnocentricity issue in any significant way. This is especially ironic given that Bosch was writing as a Christian historian and missiologist in the context of Apartheid South Africa.³¹⁰

Dayton and Fraser, in their section entitled “A People to be Reached,” do a comprehensive job of identifying the Hebrew and Greek words used for “peoples”, “tribes” and other ethnic determinants, but they beg the question of how ethnic specificity plays a part in planning strategies for World Evangelization.³¹¹

Reuben Ezemadu, a Nigerian Christian mission leader, founder of Christian Mission Foundation and charter member of the Nigeria Evangelical Missions Association (NEMA), has written a basic introduction for missions in the Nigerian church.³¹² His book builds a foundation for

³⁰⁹ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1991).

³¹⁰ Bosch does refer to Apartheid in passing on pages 407-408. Defenders of Bosch might argue that he did not want to get into the specifics of Apartheid or that he was not writing as a “prophet”, but it still seems amazing that he did not speak out against a religiously-inspired system which was horrifically counter-transformational in the creation of the one new humanity which Jesus died to establish.

³¹¹ Dayton and Fraser, *Planning Strategies*.

“knowing and doing mission” – but there are no references to overcoming the barriers of ethnocentricity or tribalism. The Tower of Babel and subsequent scattering is mentioned as evidence of God’s desire to push mankind to fulfill their God-given mandate,³¹³ but the problem of Christians with Christians of other ethnicities is never mentioned. Again, the omission is ironic because Ezemadu knows first-hand the tensions of unresolved ethnocentricity. He survived as an Ibo prisoner in the Biafran war, and now serves as an Ibo Christian in the southwest of Nigeria, in an area largely Yoruba.

Lesslie Newbigin, writing in his “Introduction to the Theology of Mission,” offers a significant critique of Donald McGavran’s perspective on numerical church growth,³¹⁴ but he fails to challenge the “Homogenous Unit Principle” and the ethnocentricity it can implicitly endorse. He also challenges the church to counter-cultural living and to “radical obedience to the plain teaching of the Bible on the issues of human dignity and social justice,”³¹⁵ but he does not articulate the implementation of this counter-cultural spirit nor the application of this radical obedience in the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic Body of Christ.

³¹² Reuben Ezemadu, *Missions and You: Discipling the Nations* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Christian Mission Foundation Publications, 2000).

³¹³ Ibid., 10.

³¹⁴ Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, see especially chapter 9, “Church Growth, Conversion, and Culture”, 121-159.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 135.

John Piper, one of the most influential writers in North America for young missions' enthusiasts, provides an excellent and thorough study of the uses of *panta ta ethne* in the New Testament and even the Septuagint.³¹⁶ But Piper misses an opportunity to influence young readers by scarcely referring to the realities of celebrating ethnic diversity or healing ethnocentric divides.

Alan Tippet, a pioneer in the field we now call "missiology," addresses topics like "Ethnohistory," "Ethnopsychology" and "Ethnotheology", in his introductory textbook, but he alludes only in passing to ethnocentricity.³¹⁷ To be fair to the times in which Tippet wrote, some of his omission may have been semantic (i.e., "ethnocentricity" was a relatively new word³¹⁸). He does refer extensively to the issues of "Paternalism" and "Race", but he does not speak to the issue of this study – affirming ethnic specificity and combating ethnocentricity (which is at the root of racism and paternalism).

More recently, Charles Van Engen has begun to address the issue by dedicating an entire section in his missiological introduction to "Mission Theology and the Church" and a chapter to the study of "The Missionary

³¹⁶ John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), see Appendix 3.

³¹⁷ Alan Tippet, *Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1987), see 155 and 418.

³¹⁸ The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) records the first use of the term to be in 1900 when W. G. McGee, in the *Annals and Reports of American Ethnology*, referred to ethnocentrism as a characteristic of primitive cultures. McGee couldn't imagine his own European culture as having ethnocentric biases. Ethnocentrism, as it is understood in the twenty-first century, was first defined in 1951 (www.answers.com/topic/ethnocentrism).

Church in Ephesians.”³¹⁹ In reference to “The Church’s Mission as Universality”, Van Engen discusses the passage in Ephesians 2, and he alludes to the fact that “all ethnic and social distinctions have been abolished in the fullness of one body, whose members have been reconciled through participation in the death and resurrection of Christ” (Ephesians 2:16-18).³²⁰ He goes on to describe the new “household” (Ephesians 2:19) that we are part of as continuing “to grow geographically, culturally, numerically, ethnically, and socially.”³²¹ The problem, however, is that he never discusses the tensions involved in this growth – especially the tensions of encouraging cultural and ethnic identity in God’s household.

The most significant omission in this discussion of affirming ethnicity versus combating ethnocentricity occurs in arguably the most influential missiological resource on the North American Church of the past twenty-five years: *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*.³²² Although the omission could perhaps be understood in the original edition, one would expect that the latest edition of this “Missions Primer” used all over North America would speak to the issues of ethnocentrism or ethnic identity – especially given the ethnocentrically motivated crises in the past

³¹⁹ Charles Van Engen, *Mission on the Way: Issues in Missions Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), Part 3 and Chapter 5 respectively.

³²⁰ Ibid., 113.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999).

fifteen years in Rwanda, in the Balkans, and in Sudan. While various articles affirm the need for cultural sensitivity, the main references to ethnocentrism seem to be Don Richardson's assertion that missionaries have NOT been ethnocentric³²³ and the uncritical affirmation of Donald McGavran's "homogeneous unit principle."³²⁴ The fact that there are no articles offered to rebut McGavran or at least offer a critical eye on his theories could be seen as "Perspectives" uniform endorsement of his views.

Literature Related to Lausanne, Billy Graham, and WEF/WEA

To further examine missiological resources on this subject of affirming ethnicity while combating ethnocentricity, I examined much of the literature affiliated with three major movements in the world of evangelical missions over the past twenty-five years: the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE), the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), especially in the conferences and publications to affirm itinerant evangelists, and the World Evangelical Fellowship (now called World Evangelical Alliance, so therefore WEA).

The Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization that set the movement in motion in 1974 is summarized in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*.³²⁵ The book speaks little to the issue of ethnicity and

³²³ See in *Perspectives*, "Do Missionaries Destroy Cultures?", 460-468.

³²⁴ See in *Perspectives* McGavran's "A Church in Every People," 617-622.

ethnocentrism, although for our purposes, it is worth noting the presentation by Dr. Donald McGavran, the creator of the “Homogeneous Unit Principle.” In his plenary address at the 1974 Lausanne Conference, “The Dimensions of World Evangelism,” McGavran affirmed, “God accepts cultures” and “redeems them.” He affirms the “magnificent and intricate mosaic of mankind,” but he never presents any challenge towards the creation of a new people in Christ – freed from ethnocentric and racial barriers. Instead, he affirms church growth through family and people movements towards Christ, the basis of his homogeneous unit church growth principles.³²⁶

Fifteen years later, a larger, more multinational group convened by LCWE in Manila for a conference entitled “Lausanne II.” This conference was dedicated to “calling the whole church to take the whole Gospel to the whole world.” The content of the conference, summarized in the compendium *Proclaim Christ Until He Comes*,³²⁷ scarcely spoke to this subject of ethnicity and ethnocentrism.

³²⁵ J. D. Douglas, ed., *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975).

³²⁶ Ibid., 96, 97, 100, and 105 respectively. To be fair to the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization, it should be noted that the Lausanne Covenant (written as part of the 1974 conference) does call for a high respect for culture (Article 10) as well as indigenous methodologies and leadership (Article 11). The Covenant underscores that all people are created in the image of God and should be so treated (Article 5). However, the Ephesians 2 vision of a reconciled new humanity with dividing walls broken down is not mentioned.

³²⁷ J. D. Douglas, ed., *Proclaim Christ Until He Comes* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1990).

One exception was John Stott³²⁸ preaching out of Romans 1:5. In his biblical exposition, he asserted that the scope of the Gospel is “*the nations*” and that Paul’s grace and apostleship was “to call people from among all the Gentiles.” Stott highlighted Paul’s Kingdom outlook towards those who were formerly “Other” by reminding listeners that although Paul was a Jew, and previously, a narrow-minded Pharisee, he had been:

...gloriously liberated from his racial prejudice. He retained a patriotic love for his own people, and longed passionately for their salvation, but now he loved the Gentiles too and longed for their salvation as well. If we are to be committed to the Christian world-mission, we need to be delivered from all pride of race, nation, cast, tribe, and class, and to acknowledge that God’s gospel is for everybody without exception.³²⁹

For a variety of reasons, Billy Graham, a key figure and co-founder/ sponsor of the Lausanne movement, started focusing his efforts more specifically on training evangelists. The “Amsterdam” conferences³³⁰ were dedicated to mobilizing and training evangelists in the non-western world. The most recent conference, “Amsterdam 2000,” appeared in written form

³²⁸ One could argue that John Stott has been the most significant voice throughout the Lausanne movement in addressing this subject, serving as architect for the Lausanne Covenant (see footnotes 325 and 326) and as the theological convener on Lausanne Consultations to affirm culture and critique the Homogeneous Unit Principle.

³²⁹ Ibid., 220.

³³⁰ Amsterdam 1983, 1986, and 2000.

as *The Mission of an Evangelist*.³³¹ In this 480-page compendium, there is scarcely a reference to the issues of racial reconciliation or ethnic healing. One message, “The Evangelist Preaches and Lives the Cross” speaks briefly to it, but only in passing. Ironically, the speaker, Antoine Rutayisire, is from Rwanda. He spoke from experience as an evangelist and as a Tutsi.³³² As inspirational as his testimony was, it did not serve to call the larger group to stand up and declare the need to break down dividing walls. Instead, the audience heard his testimony as unique in a context they did not understand.

The World Evangelical Fellowship (now Alliance), dedicated to calling Christians together to work as one,³³³ has spoken more directly to the subject of ethnicity and ethnocentrism. Peruvian theologian Dr. Samuel Escobar, a keynote speaker at the World Evangelical Fellowship Mission Commission gathering at the Iguassu Consultation in Brazil in 1999,³³⁴ addressed these issues in his message “The Global Scenario at the Turn of the Century.” Escobar discusses the competing tensions in missions of “Globalization and Contextualization” – the realities of the global village competing with the desire to contextualize the gospel to cultures and make it as indigenous as possible:

³³¹ *The Mission of an Evangelist* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 2001).

³³² See footnote 190.

³³³ The WEA existence affirms the goal of seeing the church united for the purposes of world evangelization, according to John 17:21, 23.

³³⁴ The written summary of this consultation is published as William D. Taylor, ed., *Global Missiology for the 21st Century*.

The great challenge to Christian mission at this point is for missionaries to be messengers of Jesus Christ and not just harbingers of the new globalization process. The biblical perspective on mission has a global vision and a global component that comes from faith in God the Creator and his intention to bless all of humankind through the instruments that he chooses. The contemporary globalization process has to be evaluated from that biblical perspective. Missionaries will be caught in the tension between globalization and contextualization, and they also have to avoid a provincialist attitude that exaggerates contextualization to the detriment of a biblical global awareness.³³⁵

Escobar's messages spoke well to the competing tensions of globalization versus indigenization/individual identity³³⁶ However, neither Escobar nor the entire Iguassu Consultation specifically addressed the issue of indigenization and the affirmation of ethnicity, nor the destructive anti-globalization tendency towards ethnocentrism.

ETHNICITY

Although the issue of ethnicity is vast and the various and sundry perspectives on it are beyond the scope of this paper, certain resources deserve mentioning – if only to underscore the vastness of the subject.

³³⁵ Ibid., 31.

³³⁶ These themes appear in both Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Branch* and in Chapter 19, "Global Culture" in Stan Guthrie, *Missions in the Third Millennium* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2000), 157-166.

Sinisa Malesevic's work, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*,³³⁷ is an insightful overview of the subject of ethnicity in terms of the social outworking of relationships in society. By citing various theorists and leaders perspectives on ethnicity – from Marx to Durkheim to Weber and others – Malesevic helps identify how ethnicity has, from a sociological point of view, often been used in the manipulation of peoples towards certain ideologies.³³⁸ Other ethnicity related theories are discussed and variously affirmed or discarded (ethnicity as belonging; ethnicity as family; ethnicity as biological connectedness, etc.) but few conclusions are reached. While Malesevic would probably dismiss the definitions of ethnicity assumed throughout this paper or the one offered by Donald Jacobs cited in Chapter 1,³³⁹ the extreme complications of his socio-biological definitions would render the term almost unusable

Other scholarly approached to the general subject of ethnicity include the general introduction to the topic by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Ethnicity*.³⁴⁰ Fredrik Barth's *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*³⁴¹ is more specific, underscoring the concept of "oppositional

³³⁷ Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*.

³³⁸ Even Marx's expansion of his Communist ideals interrelates with ethnicity. He saw ethnicity primarily as just a class struggle. When his economic ideology was later promoted throughout the USSR primarily by ethnic Russians, the Communists saw themselves as fostering an ideological expansion, but those being overtaken saw it as an ethnic conquest.

³³⁹ Jacobs, "Ethnicity," 323.

³⁴⁰ Hutchinson Smith, eds., *Ethnicity*.

³⁴¹ Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland

identity” in ethnic groups; he uses the term “boundaries” to refer to the method of identifying oneself based on “who I am not.”

The *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity*³⁴² and *Translating the Message: the Missionary Impact on Culture*³⁴³ link ethnicity closely with language. Sanneh explains that Western missionaries, by creating vernacular Christianity (translating the Bible into local languages), unintentionally affirmed ethnic identity as something valued by God. By so doing, the ethnicity of these individual linguistic groups was affirmed and thus enabled Christianity to become truly indigenized in ethnic specific contexts.³⁴⁴

Ethnicity: Racism, Class and Culture,³⁴⁵ *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*,³⁴⁶ and *Race and Racism: Essays in Social Geography*³⁴⁷ echo some of the same ideas of Malesevic, namely that ethnicity is only one small part of the overall

Press, 1998).

³⁴² Joshua Fishman, ed., *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

³⁴³ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*. David Martin, author of *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* in a review of John Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000) underscores the point that Sanneh makes: “As the Yoruba made the Judeo-Christian narrative their own above all through black agents [noting Samuel Crowther], it gave them a new self-consciousness over against racism and subordination” “Africa: A Mission Accomplished” (*Books and Culture* (November/December 2002), 11-17), 14.

³⁴⁵ Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity: Racism, Class and Culture* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999).

³⁴⁶ Adrian Hastings *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

³⁴⁷ Peter Jackson, ed., *Race and Racism: Essays in Social Geography* (Routledge: 1987).

sociology of human behavior. *The Invention of Ethnicity*³⁴⁸ goes a step further, asserting that ethnicity is a construct invented solely for the manipulation of people against each other.³⁴⁹

Most of the evangelical missiological resources keep ethnicity more in the biblical categories of *ethne* – people, tribes, languages, etc. For example, the compendium *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*³⁵⁰ affirms reaching out across ethnicities without ever explaining “ethnicity.” Instead, the authors concentrate on 1) the dignity of all humans created in the image of God; 2) the pervasiveness of sin in and affecting all cultures; 3) the power of the gospel to bring redemption to any culture; and 4) the presence of God found in all cultures.³⁵¹

ETHNICITY AND THEOLOGY

Certain authors have drawn attention to how our ethnic backgrounds and experiences shape the way we look at God. Writing for a general audience, Karen Armstrong documents the development of the monotheistic religions with special attention to the “refashioning” of the

³⁴⁸ Werner Sollors, ed., *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

³⁴⁹ This idea is similarly implied in Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

³⁵⁰ John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith and Justice Anderson, eds., *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998).

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 573.

views of God according to the cultural, ethnic, social, and political needs of their followers.³⁵² *The Global God: Multicultural Evangelical Views of God*³⁵³ takes a similar approach, although from a view exclusive to evangelical Christianity. In this compendium, ten contributors from nine countries write chapters on some specific attribute of God that is especially outstanding or relevant in their cultural context. The book exemplifies an understanding that God reveals himself differently to different peoples, but he is never exclusively revealed in any one ethnic context. Each culture needs the other in order to understand a more complete picture of who God is.

Other resources attempt a thorough biblical study in the opposite direction: instead of how ethnicity shapes theology, these books study how God views ethnicity throughout the Bible. Chief among these are *Ethnicity and the Bible*,³⁵⁴ *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*,³⁵⁵ *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*,³⁵⁶ and *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel*.³⁵⁷ In all of these resources, the authors attempt to underscore the fact that all

³⁵² Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993).

³⁵³ Aida Besancon Spencer and William David Spencer, eds., *The Global God: Multicultural Evangelical Views of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

³⁵⁴ Mark G. Brett, ed., *Ethnicity and the Bible* (Leiden: E. J. Brill), 1996.

³⁵⁵ Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*.

³⁵⁶ Andreas J. Kostenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2001).

³⁵⁷ Kenton L. Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel* (Winona lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998).

peoples, nations, tribes and ethnicities are part of God's plan in the redemption of humankind through Jesus Christ.³⁵⁸

Still other authors address the issues of ethnic diversity in the body of Christ by looking at specific parts of the Scriptures, most notably the book of Acts.³⁵⁹ *Resident Aliens*³⁶⁰ discusses the Christian community in its difference from the world in the way we treat the "Other" whereas *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of Acts*³⁶¹ highlights the Pentecostal theme brought forward by Harvey Cox³⁶² in his analysis of the Azusa Street Revivals which launched global Pentecostalism – namely that the fullness of the Spirit and cross-cultural community and reconciliation go hand-in-hand.³⁶³

³⁵⁸ Other general missiology resources with a strong united-in-diversity theme running through them are J. Andrew Kirk, *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations*, Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, and John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1975).

³⁵⁹ Roy Clements, *The Church That Turned the World Upside Down* (Cambridge, England: Crossway, 1992) and Ross Paterson, *The Antioch Factor: the Hidden Message of the Book of Acts* (Kent, England: Sovereign World, 2000) both provide overviews of the church in Acts as a model of unity in diversity, though they do this as a description of the church rather than a prescription for all churches.

³⁶⁰ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*. See also Howard A. Snyder's *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1977), which carries a similar theme.

³⁶¹ John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*.

³⁶² Cox, *Fire From Heaven*.

³⁶³ See footnotes 33 and 34 above. Also, David Martin, author of *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* reviews Andre Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani, eds., *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000). Martin notes Pentecostalism's unique affirmation of local indigeneity combined with global identity, a blend of ethnic affirmation yet whole church unity, something he calls "glocalism" ("Africa: A Mission Accomplished" (*Books and Culture* (November/December 2002), 11-17).

Concerning ethnicity and theology, Stephen R. Haynes³⁶⁴ offers a unique resource in his refutation of the errant teaching of the “curse of Noah’s son Ham” as the biblical justification of slavery. With similar uniqueness towards the study of ethnicity and theology, Daniel J-S Chae³⁶⁵ examines the ethnic transformation of Paul the apostle from ethnocentric Pharisee to “apostle to the Gentiles.” Chae examines Paul’s converted thinking as to what it means to be “in Christ” and how this affected his understanding of the Gospel. Chae argues that the equality of Jew and Gentile is the main subject matter of Paul’s soteriological argument in his letter to the Romans.

One final little known resource that addresses ethnicity and theology in special relationship to ecclesiology and church planting is A.R. Hay’s *The New Testament Order for Church and Missionary*.³⁶⁶ This book is one of the most thorough examinations of missionary methods,³⁶⁷ written prophetically from the context of world steeped in bigotry and racism. Hay exhorts:

Any appearance of class distinction within the churches was condemned immediately (1 Corinthians 11:20, 21; James 2:1-4). To

³⁶⁴ Haynes, *Noah’s Curse*.

³⁶⁵ Daniel J-S Chae, *Paul As Apostle to the Gentiles: His Apostolic Self-Awareness and Its Influence on the Soteriological Argument in Romans* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1997).

³⁶⁶ Alexander Rattrey Hay, *The New Testament Order for Church and Missionary* (Audubon, NJ: New Testament Missionary Union, 1947).

³⁶⁷ He writes along the spirit of Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?*

the Evangelists a soul was a soul irrespective of material circumstances, and they were neither particularly elated over the conversion of the rich nor disappointed if the majority of the members of their churches were poor. As there was no distinction of class, so there was no distinction of race. An attitude of superiority was never taken to the less cultured or the subject races. Nor was any change of methods deemed necessary in dealing with them. The appeal of the Gospel was considered to be universal and its power sufficient to meet the need of all classes and peoples. The New Testament missionaries never wrote of the “native believers” or even of “native brethren.” In the churches there were neither race problems nor nationalist problems, for all believers were brethren and all were one in Christ.³⁶⁸

ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY

Several books related specifically to ethnicity and identity deserve special note. Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako served as a pioneer in this field when he wrote *Theology and Identity*.³⁶⁹ In it, he explores the question of the Christian identity in the Second Century context of the Greco-Roman culture and then contrasts this with the modern African

³⁶⁸ Hay, *The New Testament Order*, 434.

³⁶⁹ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity* (Cumbria, UK: Regnum Books, 1992). Lola Romanucci-Ross and George De Vos, eds., *Ethnic Identity, Third Edition*. (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1995) is also helpful, though not written with any Christian world view in mind.

Christian cultural issues of identity, integration, and tribalism. His next book *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*³⁷⁰ further developed the theme.

I have several times made mention of the work of James and Mary Tillman³⁷¹ in pushing my understanding of “oppositional identity” or “my identity at your expense” as a root cause of racism. The work of Dick Keyes³⁷² offers a positive response to this root cause by explaining what it is to find our identity “in Christ” rather than based on ethnicity.

Two other non-literary resources further pursue the link between ethnicity and a personal sense of identity. The Overseas Ministries Study Center³⁷³ offer two one-week seminars related to this topic. Dr. Tite Tienou leads one entitled *Ethnicity as a Gift and Barrier: Human Identity and Christian Mission* which addresses the topic directly. Dr. Darrell Whiteman leads another entitled *Cultures, Values, and Worldview: Anthropology for Christian Mission*.

³⁷⁰ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*.

³⁷¹ James and Mary Tillman, *Why America Needs Poverty and Racism*.

³⁷² Keyes, *Beyond Identity*.

³⁷³ Overseas Ministries Study Center, 490 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT, 06511 (www.omsc.org).

ETHNICITY, ETHNOCENTRICITY, AND PEOPLE IN CONFLICT

Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*³⁷⁴ served to bring the post-Soviet world to the realization that the world was not going to become one grand homogenous unit built around technology and democracy.³⁷⁵ His pioneering thinking related to the new ethnic-specific "civilizations," and this helped him predict ethnocentric warfares ahead in global politics as ethnic identity replaced nationhood or ideologies.

Along the same line of thinking, Benjamin R. Barber's article and subsequent book *Jihad vs. McWorld*³⁷⁶ preceded Huntington but received more attention after *The Clash of Civilizations* became popular. Barber's phrase, "Jihad vs. McWorld" has become quite commonplace in the discussion related to the competing pressures of ethnic-specific groups resisting globalization.³⁷⁷ Barber predicts two possible political futures, each of which is potentially destructive to issues like human rights and democracy.

On the one hand, he predicts a "retribalization" of groups bonded together in opposition against each other and against the impact of

³⁷⁴ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*.

³⁷⁵ While Huntington is often seen as the pioneer here, others like Barber and Kaplan preceded him by several years, and Vernon Reynolds, et al., eds., *The Sociobiology of Ethnocentrism: Evolutionary Dimensions of Xenophobia, Discrimination, Racism, and Nationalism* (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1987) preceded them all.

³⁷⁶ Barber, "Jihad vs. McWorld."

³⁷⁷ See also my discussion of the positive and negative missiological implications of globalization in Chapter 3 above.

exported unifiers (which they interpret as destroyers of culture). He sees one future scenario full of war and bloodshed “in which culture is pitted against culture, people against people, tribe against tribe—a Jihad in the name of a hundred narrowly conceived faiths against every kind of interdependence, every kind of artificial social cooperation and civic mutuality.”³⁷⁸

Barber’s second image focuses on economic and ecological forces pushing the world towards integration and uniformity which disregard national and cultural boundaries. Fast food, common music, computerization and other globalizing influences will try “pressing nations into one commercially homogenous global network: one McWorld tied together by technology, ecology, communications, and commerce.”³⁷⁹

From a secular viewpoint, Barber discusses in a sense the “particularity versus universality” of Andrew Walls³⁸⁰ – though the “particularity” is a jihadist perspective based on hyper-ethnocentricity and the “universality” is based on globalization, not on any design of the Creator. Following the same line of thinking pre-Huntington, Robert Kaplan’s article “The Coming Anarchy”³⁸¹ presented a similar bleak

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 53

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 53.

³⁸⁰ Andrew Walls, “The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture,” 3-15.

³⁸¹ Robert D. Kaplan, “The Coming Anarchy” (*Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994), 44-76.

outlook of a world out of control because of scarcity, crime, overpopulation, tribalism, and disease.

Terms like “clashing civilizations,” “retribalization,” “ethnic jihad,” “Balkanization,” and “Lebanonization” began to appear as the 1990’s unfolded with the near genocide of the Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda and the attempted eradication of the Bosnians by the Serbs. Since that time, many resources have appeared dedicated to understanding the relationship of ethnocentricity to inter-ethnic conflict.³⁸²

From a Christian and missiological framework, the article by Enoch Wan on “ethnocentricity”³⁸³ helps explain both the causes and impact of ethnocentricity. He explains that the exclusivism caused by “the belief that one’s own people group or cultural ways is superior to others...[can be ultimately] manifested in individual action or institutionalized policy toward others as in the case of anti-Semitism, apartheid, bigotry, fascism, and racism.”³⁸⁴ Wan boldly states that ethnocentrism is counter-productive with the global mission of the church. He writes:

Ethnocentrism can curtail or cripple efforts in missions.... Persons with an ethnocentric orientation have difficulty developing a genuine

³⁸² Literature written to address this issue includes: Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Cote Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven Miller, (eds.) *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996); Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Religion, Ethnicity, and Self-Identity: Nations in Turmoil* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997); and Winston A. Van Horne, ed., *Global Convulsions: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997).

³⁸³ Enoch Wan, “Ethnocentrism” in A. Scott Moreau, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 324).

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

social relationship with members outside their group. While we must recognize that no one is entirely without prejudice or ethnocentrism of some kind, ethnocentrism in the Christian inhibits obedience to the Great Commandment ("love your neighbor as yourself") and the Great Commission. Ethnocentrism is a significant obstacle to missionaries serving as messengers of the "gospel of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5).³⁸⁵

Finally in the discussion of ethnocentricity and conflict, Susanne Hargrave adds a unique point in this discussion by pointing out that the relativistic, pluralistic spirit of our age actually has underlying ethnocentric foundations. She writes:

It is a subtle ethnocentrism that says, "Your religion is essentially another way of worshiping the same God I worship." What purports to be a humbler acknowledgement of others' insights and grasp of

³⁸⁵ Ibid. In his chapter, "Monocultural Versus Cross-Cultural Perspectives: Analyzing Feelings of Superiority," Gailyn Van Rheenan explains ethnocentricity in this way: "Ethnocentrism is an extension of monoculturalism. When monoculturalists are thrown into cross-cultural settings, they pridefully interpret reality on the basis of their monocultural assumptions. They assume that their ways are superior and thus arrogantly reject new perceptions of reality. This cultural pride may be compared with egotism. Egotism says, 'My way is better than your way.' Ethnocentrism says, 'My culture is better than your culture.' What egocentrism is on the personal level, ethnocentrism is on the cultural level. Ethnocentrism is the basis for racism, tribalism, and nationalism" He goes on to challenge the monocultural worldview by making three assertions:

- 1) "Monoculturalists equate their own perceptions of reality with reality itself."
- 2) "Monoculturalists assume that their beliefs were accepted because they are superior."
- 3) "Monoculturalists have no respect for other cultures or subcultures" (Gailyn Van Rheenan, *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 98, 101.

truth may be but a reduction of all religions, in their rich variety of beliefs and practices, to variations on the same theme.³⁸⁶

ISSUES OF RECONCILIATION

If the resources cited above point largely to the description of ethnicity, ethnocentricity, and related issues, the literature shifts when we begin to look at prescriptions for change. When the topic moves from “this is ethnocentricism and here is how it has affected the world” to “here is what we can do about it,” we move to resources related to reconciliation, forgiveness, and building intentional multi-cultural communities.

When research for this paper began, it seemed that almost all the literature on issues of ethnicity were directed at addressing, evaluating, and lamenting the reality of relationships between Blacks and Whites in the United States. Even the biblical study *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*³⁸⁷ seemed pre-occupied with American racial issues as the author concentrated primarily on the issue of dark-skinned or Black people in the Bible.

Typical in this genre is *What Color is Your God: Black Consciousness and the Christian Faith*.³⁸⁸ Written originally in response to the Black Power movements of the 1970’s under the title *Your God is*

³⁸⁶ Susanne Hargrave, “Culture, Abstraction, and Ethnocentrism”, *Missiology* 21, no. 1 (January 1993): 9.

³⁸⁷ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*.

³⁸⁸ Columbus Salley and Ronald Behm, *What Color is Your God: Black Consciousness and the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1981).

Too White, the intent is to get white Americans to own their history of an American Christianity aligned with slavery, segregation, and oppression. With a similar perspective, Emerson and Smith's *Divided by Faith*³⁸⁹ explored white evangelical America at the grassroots level and painted a dismal picture of race relations in the church, concluding that there wasn't much hope in sight for any true reconciliation.³⁹⁰ The secular release *Everything But the Burden*³⁹¹ laments the hijacking of Black Culture by White America, asserting that the overtaking of cultural expressions like hip-hop music, attire, Rastafarian-style dreadlocks, and language are actually a new version of White oppression.

Without discounting the long and harsh realities of Black-White relations, other authors in the past decade began to encourage greater forward progress toward healthy reconciliation. Clarence Shuler³⁹² pioneered in this area, but the greater leadership in this respect was provided by African-American author George Yancey, whose books *One Body, One Spirit*³⁹³ and *Beyond Racial Gridlock*³⁹⁴ encourage

³⁸⁹ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³⁹⁰ Craig Stephen Smith follows a similar linkage to an oppressive past from a Native American point of view in *Whiteman's Gospel* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Indian Life Books, 1997). Smith, himself a Native-American, provides a perspective on the harm done by the Anglo-dominated Christian church and its emphasis on global missions – all the while ignoring the challenge of bridge-building to Native Americans who suffered under the “white man’s gospel.”

³⁹¹ Greg Tate, ed., *Everything But the Burden: What White People Are Taking From Black Culture* (New York: Harlem Moon, 2003).

³⁹² Clarence Shuler, *Winning the Race to Unity: Is Racial Reconciliation Really Working* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998).

acknowledgement of the past including the acknowledgement of failed perspectives on reconciliation, like “color blindness,” “Anglo-conformity,” or blaming all Black problems on white people. But Yancey exhorts a new model, moving forward in the spirit of intentionality, a theme summarized in the subtitle of the second book, “embracing mutual responsibility.” Others have come along this intentionality movement and offered resources that provide practical tools for building positive inter-racial change.³⁹⁵

Two recent releases written from a Christian perspective take new and unique approaches in the arena of addressing Black-White relations in the American contexts. *Being White in a Multi-Ethnic World: Our Part in the Body*³⁹⁶ speaks to the helpless feeling that culturally sensitive Whites often experience and offer a balanced self-identity for those from the Majority culture. The Black-White team of Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson take a different approach,³⁹⁷ advocating a spiritual transformational approach to racial reconciliation. They rely strongly on the belief that true interpersonal racial reconciliation must be the work of

³⁹³ George Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006).

³⁹⁴ George Yancey, *Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006).

³⁹⁵ One example is Sandra Barnes' *Subverting the Power of Prejudice: Resources for Individual and Social Change* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2006).

³⁹⁶ Schaupp and Harris, *Being White*.

³⁹⁷ Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2004).

the Spirit, because only the Holy Spirit can give Whites the courage to listen and embrace the fact and give Blacks the strength and grace to forgive the past and move on.³⁹⁸

Beyond the Black-White issues specifically, other authors address reconciliation from a wider perspective. Eric Law³⁹⁹ and Robert Schreiter have written extensively in this area, especially as it pertains to cross-cultural relationships in church life.

Law, an Episcopal priest and consultant in the field of multiculturalism, concentrates on issues of inclusivism, exclusivism, and Christ as the “gateway” to grace for all diverse peoples. Racial reconciliation and unity, according to Law, is based on the perspectives of both the power brokers and the powerless. His key concept is living out the cycle of death and resurrection, the cross and the empty tomb – depending on which position of power you enter with in the multicultural society.⁴⁰⁰

From this vantage point, he promotes something he calls the “Cycle of Gospel Living” where he encouraged the powerless to focus on empowerment, the empty tomb, and resurrection. The powerful, in contrast, need to give up power by choosing the cross and the way of

³⁹⁸ Native American writer Randy Woodley follows a similar theme in *Living in Color: Embracing God's Passion for Diversity* (Waco, TX: Chosen Books 2001).

³⁹⁹ Eric H.F. Law, *Inclusion: Making Room for Grace* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000) and Eric H.F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Lie Down With the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993).

⁴⁰⁰ Law, *The Wolf Shall Lie Down With the Lamb*, 37f, 74.

death. "Every Christian is called to live out the cycle of the cross and resurrection, Lent and Easter. In a multicultural society, living out this cycle becomes even more crucial."⁴⁰¹ Law is unique with respect to ethnocentrism because he asserts the purpose of the monocultural community: (1) to find identity and self-esteem as a group providing a stable foundation from which the community can reach out; and (2) to do homework together in order to prepare to encounter other cultural communities.⁴⁰²

Robert J. Schreiter⁴⁰³ takes a more biblically founded approach, examining the need for reconciliation in our new multi-cultural world order but then offering practical insights on reconciliation in relationship to the past. He explores Paul's theology for reconciling Jew and Gentile, and he concludes with a call to the church to be a minister of reconciliation.

Others pursue the practical ramifications of reconciliation, with their main themes following certain patterns. Some encourage the long journey of reconciliation in the building of cross-cultural relationships.⁴⁰⁴ Others focus on the need to address the hurts of the past⁴⁰⁵ while others deal with

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 79.

⁴⁰³ Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992).

⁴⁰⁴ See John Paul Lederach, *The Journey Toward Reconciliation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999).

⁴⁰⁵ See in this regard both Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (New York: Vintage Departures, 1994) as well as Ed Cairns and Michael D. Roe eds., *The role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict* (Palgrave Macmillan: 2003).

the past but point towards the future by focusing on forgiveness.⁴⁰⁶

Unique in this genre is the work of Schriver, who addresses the political community with the biblical value of forgiveness.⁴⁰⁷

Perhaps the greatest balance in the combined areas of embracing the past, wrestling with issues of ethnocentricity, pursuing reconciliation, and struggling with forgiveness appears in the work of Miroslav Volf.⁴⁰⁸

Writing from the context and experience of the war-torn, ethnically divided Balkans, Volf explores the meaning of biblical reconciliation in human relationships – to the point that exclusivistic ethnocentric peoples can actually “embrace” and forgive each other. Perhaps the most significant insight is his connection of the need to remember the past in order to forgive it.

⁴⁰⁶ See L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). Most noteworthy here perhaps is Desmond Tutu's famous accounts of the South Africa “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” in *No Future Without Forgiveness*. Michael Cassidy takes a similar approach towards South Africa's legacy of Apartheid in *The Passing Summer: A South African Pilgrimage in the Politics of Love* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989).

⁴⁰⁷ Donald J. Schriver, Jr., *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Schriver, a former seminary president, provides a presentation to the secular world on how to resolve international conflicts. He emphasizes forgiveness in the context of historical conflicts, long-standing resentments between peoples, and ethnic disputes. See also Raymond Helmick and Rodney Peterson, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation, 2001).

⁴⁰⁸ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*.

INDIGENOUS ETHNICITY ISSUES IN MISSIOLOGY

Paul Hiebert⁴⁰⁹ expresses in his reflections the fact that issues of ethnicity, ethnocentricity, and missiology are now intertwined. His topic-related themes include culturally relevant contextualization, church planting amongst specific ethnic peoples, and a view of anthropology he calls “ethnoscience.” Hiebert’s perspective indicates the degree to which the missiology of Donald McGavran has permeated contemporary thinking.

Perhaps the McGavran emphasis on Homogeneous Units as the basis for church planting has subsided, but his missiology often connects in the literature in relationship to issues of ethnicity in the promotion of indigenous theologies, especially for the marginalized and oppressed who are seeking to regain a sense of identity.⁴¹⁰ Providing a healthy balance in this arena is Robert Schreiter;⁴¹¹ he provides critical reflection on ethnic-specific theologies. While affirming indigenous theologies as representative of the dynamic interaction of the Gospel with local cultural

⁴⁰⁹ Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

⁴¹⁰ Examples include Richard Twiss writing for Native Peoples in *One Church Many Tribes: Following Jesus The Way God Made You* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books 2000) or Robert Blincoe writing about ethnic-specific church growth in *Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons From Kurdistan* (Pasadena, CA: U.S. Center for World Mission, 1998) or authors writing about Dalit Christianity or “Tamil Movements” in Judith M. Brown and Robert Eric Frykenberg, eds., *Christians, Cultural Interactions, and India’s Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

⁴¹¹ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

application, he also critiques these theologies and identifies some of the dangers toward ethnocentricity that lie within them.

ETHNICITY AND INTENTIONALITY TOWARDS DIVERSITY

Much of the contemporary literature dedicated to the issue of ethnicity, ethnocentricity, and creating communities that exemplify unity-in-diversity concentrate on the issue of intentionality. In other words, unity-in-diversity will take work. It's not just going to happen naturally.⁴¹²

Literature focuses on intentionality in building the local church,⁴¹³ intentionality in building multi-cultural leadership teams,⁴¹⁴ and

⁴¹² Benjamin Schwarz, in "The Diversity Myth: America's Leading Export" (*Atlantic Monthly*, May 1995, 57-67) underscores this reality by examining the so-called "melting pot" of the United States of America. Schwarz contends that America's leaders have a tough time understanding the world because they see America as the model of many ethnicities coming together and living as one (*e pluribus unum* – out of the many, one). "America, therefore, is regarded as a highly successful model of a multi-ethnic, multicultural, multireligious, and polyglot society. Out of many we are one. With this understanding of their country's cultural and political development, U.S. statesmen and foreign-policy observers ingenuously and smugly ask fragmented societies, Can't you all get along, just as we do over here?" (60). Schwarz' main point, however, is that this "American unity" is a myth. The author asserts that our "American unity" was based on making everyone into a "modified Englishman" (62). "Thus, long before the United States' founding, and until probably the 1960s, the "unity" of the American people derived not from their warm welcoming of and accommodation to nationalist, ethnic, and linguistic differences but from the ability and willingness of an Anglo elite to stamp its image on other peoples coming to this country. "Americanization, then, although it did not cleanse America of its ethnic minorities, cleansed its minorities of their ethnicities" (62).

⁴¹³ See Curtis DeYoung, et al., *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Fumitaka Matsuoka, *The Color of Faith: Building Community in a Multiracial Society* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998); Manuel Ortiz, *One New People: Models For Developing a Multiethnic Church* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1996); and Norman Anthony Peart, *Separate No More: Understanding and Developing Racial Reconciliation in Your Church*; and Michael Pocock and Joseph Henriques, *Cultural Change and Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

⁴¹⁴ See Lianne Roembke, *Building Credible Multicultural Teams* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000) as well as Charles R. Foster, *Embracing Diversity: Leadership in Multicultural Congregations* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1997). Foster

intentionality in reaching out locally across cultures.⁴¹⁵ One editorial team addresses the issue of multi-cultural spirituality,⁴¹⁶ but most concentrate on practical how-to's regarding developing diversity.⁴¹⁷

Stephen Rhodes offers a unique contribution⁴¹⁸ as one of several writers who write from a case-study platform, describing the transformation of one specific congregation into greater unity-in-diversity. Writing from the context of pastoring a multi-ethnic church in the suburbs of Washington, DC, he underscores the intentionality theme, insisting that churches and individuals must make an active choice to be multi-racial: "we chose to put aside our differences as a church and come together as Christ's body, intentionally claiming our identity as a multi-racial congregation."⁴¹⁹ Thinking of their congregation, Culmore United Methodist Church, Rhodes critiques the way that modern church-growth movements "profile" the people they are trying to reach: "There will be no

offers a unique approach for urban settings of by encouraging leaders to embrace diversity in communities that are already diverse rather than intentionally created to reflect the body of Christ.

⁴¹⁵ See Adeney, "Think Globally, Love Locally," Hopler, *Reaching the World Next Door*, and Hanciles. "Migration and Mission."

⁴¹⁶ Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang, and Gary A. Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

⁴¹⁷ Yancey is a good example of the how-to approach, In *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches*, he suggests seven general principles for building multiracial churches (67 ff). These include inclusive worship, diverse leadership, an overarching goal, intentionality, personal skills, location, and adaptability.

⁴¹⁸ Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet*.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 83. Like all case studies, Rhodes' comments must be taken in context. In the way that McGavran advocated church-planting along homogeneous units in the caste and ethnically divided India where his ideas developed, Rhodes casts his vision in his multi-cultural context where people are already living, working, and socializing together.

‘Culmore Calvins’ to join the ‘Saddleback Sams’ or the ‘Willow Creek Unchurched Harrys or Marys’ of the church-growth methodology for profiling potential members. All we can do is welcome each man and woman and help them follow God’s calling in their lives.”⁴²⁰

Rhodes excels in his understanding of the new humanity be created when ethnicity is made secondary to our supreme identity in Christ. He writes:

God values human culture. God values our identity, our ethnicity, our heritage. Yet those things cannot wholly define us, nor can they save us. Rather, God invites us into his house, his home – *bet-Yahweh* [the strongest sense of inclusion, identity, protection, and responsibility], the *oikos* of God. Although culture may tell us where we’ve come from, our identity in the family of God tells us where we are going, where we belong: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9).⁴²¹

Peart⁴²² offers another unique contribution with his suggestion of a “Reconciliation Continuum.” He says that churches and organizations fall into five categories: 1) Segregation is complete and intentional separation. 2) Differentiation chooses to be ethnic specific (“we choose not to attract

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 97.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 121.

⁴²² Peart, *Separate No More*, 109.

people different from ourselves”). 3) Assimilation means that all are welcome, but the newcomers are expected to adapt to the dominant culture. 4) Intentional, but irrational is virtually synonymous with what others call “color-blindness” (differences are suppressed or negated for the sake of unity). 5) HImtegration (his term) is his description of what it means for a church to live out the new humanity of Ephesians 2:13-16.

CHAPTER 5: FROM CONCEPTS TO PRACTICE

This research began with a question:

How can we develop leaders who are serving in multiple cultural contexts so that they understand a biblical theology of ethnicity and culture which will simultaneously help them to understand the value of ethnicity and culture yet also embrace the multi-cultural new humanity which Jesus died to create so that these leaders can also speak against ethnocentricity, work for reconciliation, and serve as biblical peace-makers.

After a careful review of the Scriptures and related literature on the subject, I concluded that the best approach was to generate a course that took the reader through the Scriptures and confronted him or her with the biblical perspective on the “Other.” From this point, the course would then encourage the leader to start pursuing with intentionality biblical goals for his or her local ministry, incorporating both the affirmation of “particularity” (i.e., the affirmation of ethnic identity) and the challenge of “universality” (i.e., the “pilgrim principle” which combats harmful ethnocentricity).

Taking the issue of “Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity” from the theoretical to the practical has been the challenge of this research. Stating that “so-and-so says this” or “this scholar asserts that” needs to be taken to the grassroots level so that it can be useful in real day-to-day ministry – like the church in North India where the pastor has a

congregation representing fifteen different ethnic groups and castes, most whom do not understand why they sometimes struggle to get along with each other or why their “home fellowships” somehow always end up being mono-cultural.

To take this research into the implementation phase, I decided to design a course entitled simply “Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity.” I intended it for use in the Master of Arts in Christian Organizational Leadership offered by Development Associates International in cooperation with schools in India, Congo, Uganda, and Central African Republic.

Our educational coordinators chose to include this course as a requirement for third year participants because they assumed that earlier foundational courses like “Servant Leadership” would set the participants in a place where they were ready to serve, have their cultural blinders lifted, and move against the ethnocentric tendencies in which they might have been raised.

COURSE FORMAT

I designed the course using a format that had been designed through the creation of other courses authored by Development Associates International. In each lesson, the course designer attempts to present all or most of the following (quoting directly from the course design template):

- **Instructional advice** is used by the course instructor to highlight certain aspects of your learning experience.
- **Instant application** makes the learning practical and relevant. This may include writing an essay or completing an assignment about the unit. It further stimulates your own reflection and helps you set personal growth goals.
- **Inductive Bible study** invites you to discover for yourself important principles from Scripture and relate God's word to the subject of the unit.
- **Interactive learning** encourages you to stop and think about an issue or discuss it with a small group. Certain exercises require your participation and interaction with the material.
- **Inspiring input** provides you with a fictional case study⁴²³ that continues throughout the course. Other examples and stories may be used at times.
- **Insightful lecturette** gives you brief and pointed insights and teachings from the perspective of the course author to guide your learning.
- **Inspirational readings** are found at the end of each unit. The readings offer additional information related to the subject matter of

⁴²³ While many of the courses generated by Development Associates International include a case study that weaves through the entire course, I decided against this for "Culture, Ethnicity and Diversity" because a case study would by design be contextually limited. Instead, I decided to use case studies throughout which spoke to the issues of that particular lesson. Those who oversee all Development Associates International courses are still deciding if a course-long case study could be written.

the unit. In some cases a textbook is used to accompany the course.

COURSE PRESENTATION AND USE

The course format assumes a five-day residential introduction followed by thirteen to fifteen weeks of self-study, including email correspondence with and assignments submitted to the professor. The course's written assignments incorporate the reading of articles, Bible study, reading a text, answering inductive questions, and wrestling with local applications. Depending on the school with which Development Associates International is partnering, a final exam must also be completed.

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

To explain the entire process of the implementation of the Project that I have designed, I will present these aspects of the project:

- First, I will present the project itself in summary form and then in its completed form.⁴²⁴
- Second, I will discuss briefly the readings that I selected for use in this course.

⁴²⁴ At this writing, the course "Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity" has already been presented and is in the process of being completed by twenty-eight leaders in two cohorts in India. In the Mumbai cohort, eight leaders are completing the course; in the Delhi cohort, twenty leaders are completing the course. All of these will finish their final projects and then sit for their final exam in late February 2007.

- In Appendix 1, I present the “Facilitators Guide” which I designed so that other teachers can use this course.⁴²⁵
- In Appendix 2, I show the sample questions that I have submitted to Allahabad University in India (our sponsoring institution for the M.A.) simply to show the priority that I have assigned to certain aspects or themes in the course.

Summary of the Course

The following outlines the main thrust of the thirteen units in the “Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity” course. Footnotes explain why certain topics were chosen for the emphasis of certain Units.

UNIT 1: Main point: create a compelling sense of why this course is needed.

- My story.
- Tell the Development Associates International story as it relates to the Rwanda Genocide 60 years after the East African Revival.
- Overview/ Definitions of Terms / Give readers a sense of where the course is going in terms of Bible Study.

⁴²⁵ The course has been introduced in Uganda in early 2007 and coordinated by my Development Associates International co-worker Nagi Said from Cairo, Egypt. He is using this guide already.

UNIT 2: Main point: creation and the subsequent Fall leads to relational breakdown in and interpersonal conflict.

- All people are created in the image of God, and our internal security and identity should be found in that relationship.
- But sin has entered the world, and that internal security and identity has been lost.
- Out of our insecurities, we start looking for others that we can look down upon; we start finding identity at the expense of someone else – i.e., we develop an oppositional identity.

UNIT 3: Main point: culture and diversity is God's creation; therefore, every culture has something to teach us about God's character.

- In the Bible, humans feared this diversity so they built the Tower of Babel to create a man-made unity.
- As a result, God dispersed people to create the diversity he intended.
- The church and Christians often react with the same fears of diversity.

UNIT 4: Main point: God cares for the outsider and so should we.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁶ Unit 4 was inserted to get students into the Old Testament passages related to care for the alien and the stranger, and New Testament passages related to how Jesus related to the "Other." After reading Judy Gundry-Volf, "Spirit, Mercy, and the Other," *Theology Today* 51 (January 1995) where she recounts Jesus encounters with the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-30) and the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30), noting specifically the Gospel writers "stories about the inclusion of the 'Other,' about crossing the boundaries caused by ethnic, religious, social, and gender otherness and bringing about a new inclusive community of salvation" (508), I decided that failing to include these would fail to present our most powerful example, the Lord Jesus, "a Jew who did not impose on [the woman] the Jewish stereotype of a Samaritan... and ... a man who did not impose on her the stereotype of a woman" (510), In Jesus, Gundry-Volf

UNIT 5: Main point: God blesses his people SO THAT they in turn can be a blessing to all the ethnicities and cultures of the earth.

- Abraham's covenant and Psalm 67.
- Israel serves as an example of what happens to the people of God when they receive his blessing and selfishly fail to share it.

UNIT 6: Main point: the desire to reach out to, love, or forgive people who are different than ourselves often confronts a wall of opposition because of history.

- The story of Jonah as it applies to us today.⁴²⁷
- Forgiveness will mean letting go of historical bitterness.

UNIT 7: Main point: a challenge to start taking action by reaching out to the "Other" and making concrete steps towards reconciliation.

- Contemporary case studies from the Lausanne (Pattaya 2004) paper on reconciliation – featuring actual accounts of groups that took intentional action steps towards reconciliation.

notes, God's mercy triumphs over "the prejudice-based distance between nations and cultures" (522).

In addition, practically speaking, we added it simply to give some immediate opportunity for the course participants to begin looking for chances to reach out to the "Other" in their own midst.

⁴²⁷ As I evaluated the Genesis through Revelation study of the course, I decided that the book of Jonah was the best possible biblical resource for helping people identify ethnic hatred that they might have towards historical oppressors. Jonah's story demonstrates God's concern for all peoples – and part of the reconciliation process might include going to these people to communicate the Good News of God's love.

UNIT 8: Main point: identify God's design that the church be multi-cultural with multi-cultural leadership.

- Connect the fullness of the Holy Spirit with racial and ethnic reconciliation.
- Identify the struggles that we face when we try to become intentionally diverse.

UNIT 9: Main point: identify 9 principles from Acts for breaking down walls between culturally diverse peoples.⁴²⁸

- Every believer brings his or her unique culture and diverse traits and traditions to the fellowship.
- Examine the barriers that must be overcome to reach this goal.

UNIT 10: Main point: understand the horizontal nature of salvation – that accepting Jesus means accepting the “Other” whom Jesus accepts.⁴²⁹

- Understand that Jesus' death on the cross breaks down the dividing wall of hostility between separated peoples.

⁴²⁸ Like Unit 4, this Unit was designed to give some practical tools from the example of Peter with Cornelius (Acts 10) that participants can use in their ministries to start building united diversity.

⁴²⁹ The passage in Ephesians 2:14-22 is so significant in this matter that I dedicated two full units (Unit 10 and 11) simply to examining it.

UNIT 11: Main point: in Christ we find our supreme identity (all other external identities of race, ethnicity, culture, wealth/poverty, etc. are secondary).

- The church is a new humanity where God blends all the beauty of the cultures he has created into something that reveals his diverse and awesome creation.
- Unity in Christ does not require uniformity in culture.

UNIT 12: Main point: the biblical vision of heaven is people from many cultures and ethnicities and nationalities worshipping God in all their diversity – how can we start developing more heaven-like worship in our churches?

- The Ephesian moment (including the reading from Andrew Walls).
- Reminding people that some aspects of our cultural diversity are preserved in heaven.

UNIT 13: Main point: to encourage decisions of intentionality with regard to developing the diversity of our relationships, our communities, and our churches.

- Reminders of course key points:
 - All people are created in the image of God;
 - Christ as our supreme identity;
 - Jesus breaks down the walls between separated peoples;

- Culture as one of the ways God reveals himself;
- Intentionality: now it's time to take action.

COURSE READINGS

After completing my research for the development of this course, I then had to decide what readings I thought would be most useful in helping participants grasp and implement the most essential ideas of the course. The course is salted with brief articles and case studies, but I chose the following resources as essential reading:

As the principle text, I selected George Yancey's *Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility*⁴³⁰ for three reasons. First, it serves as a case study that addresses reconciliation between racial separated peoples. Second, it offers an understandable four-fold model of how differing cultures can view the "Other" that can be replicated in many cultures. And most significantly, the book affirms the concepts of intentionality and mutuality in pursuing diverse fellowship – two concepts that I hope participants in this course will embrace as a ministry lifestyle. In the early readings, I chose Andrew Walls' "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture"⁴³¹ because it introduces readers to the foundational concepts of the indigenizing principle (particularity) and the pilgrim principle (universality) in the life of Jesus and therefore in all of our lives.

⁴³⁰ Yancey, *Beyond Racial Gridlock*.

⁴³¹ Andrew Walls, "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture," 3-15.

In the discussion of human beings created in the image of God, I wanted the leaders to be familiar with the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁴³² because it affirms biblical values but offers no biblical foundation. My hope is that in reading this document, participants in the course will see how our biblical faith gives value to all people in a way that other documents cannot.

I wanted readers to be familiar with the Lausanne Occasional Paper, the *“Willowbank Report on Gospel and Culture,”*⁴³³ because I realized that most of the leaders we train are not missiologists and often have little training on understanding culture – especially from a Christian perspective. I thought that this document offered perhaps the best balance between understanding and affirming ethnic and cultural uniqueness as a gift from God but at the same time combating the human inclination towards ethnocentricity.

In addressing the matters of reconciliation and forgiveness, I chose the document created at the Lausanne Conference in Pattaya (2004) entitled *“Reconciliation as the Mission of God: Faithful Christian Witness in a World of Destructive Conflicts and Divisions.”*⁴³⁴ The combination of good reconciliation theology with real-life case studies provides a

⁴³² <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>.

⁴³³ http://community.gospelcom.net/printable_template.jsp?how_print=no&backPageID=14322&smpl_sakey=44904.

⁴³⁴ Paper produced at the Lausanne Pattaya consultation (2004), Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 51 (http://community.gospelcom.net/lcwe/assets/LOP51_IG22.pdf).

foundation for participants in this course to believe that reconciliation is possible and see how it has happened in contexts that may resemble their own.

To force participants in the course to do some more missiological thinking as it relates to the topic of “Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity,” I selected the Lausanne Occasional Paper from the 1977 Pasadena Consultation on the Homogeneous Unit Principle.⁴³⁵ I wanted readers to understand the Homogeneous Unit Principle concept as well as hear scholars and experts refute it in light of God’s united diversity vision for the Church.

And finally, I chose Andrew Walls’ “The Ephesian Moment”⁴³⁶ because I wanted to get leaders thinking about the fact that we are living in a unique time and place in world history, and the issues of “Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity” are critical matters in understanding God at work in our times.

⁴³⁵ <http://community.gospelcom.net/Brix?pageID=14290>.

⁴³⁶ Walls, “The Ephesian Moment,” 72-81.

**CHAPTER 6: FROM THE “OTHER” TO BROTHER AND SISTER:
KEY ISSUES IN TRAINING LEADERS**

So what have we learned? If our goal is to train leaders who can provide leadership in their own complex multiple cultural contexts which will affirm the value of ethnicity and culture yet also embrace the multi-cultural new humanity which Jesus died to create, what has this research taught us? What are the core truths which will undergird these leaders so that they can speak against ethnocentricity, work for reconciliation, and serve as biblical peace-makers. To state it more drastically, what has the research shown which can now be implemented so that tragedies like the violence of the Rwandan genocide of 1994 is not repeated?

The lessons learned – which have shaped the “Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity” course presented in Chapter 5 – fall into three overlapping but distinct categories:

- 1) Foundational biblical truths
- 2) Cross-cultural missiological understanding, and
- 3) Practical ministry actions

FOUNDATIONAL BIBLICAL TRUTHS

As I have stated earlier, the approach towards leadership development that seemed to carry the greatest unlimited cross-cultural

applicability as well as the potential for spiritual transformation was to take leaders through foundational truths of the Scriptures.

Creation. Perhaps the most significant biblical truth – especially as it pertains to people of all cultures relating peaceably towards the “Other” (i.e., as opposed to Christians relating to other Christians) – is the biblical doctrine of creation. The biblical affirmation that every human being is created in the image of God – equally, beautifully, and uniquely – demands that we must view every other person as an equal. Further, the doctrine of creation and the reality of every person being created in the image of God implies that every person therefore – even in their fallenness – has something to teach me about God. To despise the “Other” – regardless of our myriad cultural or ethnic differences – is to despise our Creator.⁴³⁷

The Fall. In order to understand the world and the ethnic tensions and ethnocentricity that exists, we must also underscore the biblical doctrine of the Fall. Adam and Eve’s choice to sin broke multiple relationships – humanity with God, humanity with nature, humanity with each other, and human beings with themselves. The Fall led to the human loss of identity (or at least the loss of our security in our identity) and created the relational environment where we need to start establishing ourselves against the “Other.”

⁴³⁷ Murder, which is the ultimate statement of despising the “Other” is prohibited based on the first covenant between God and humanity with Noah. Noah suggests in Genesis 9:6: “Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind.”

The Fall disconnects us with our Creator, so we enter into the world with a need to define our own identity, which we often do at the expense of another. This oppositional identity resulting from our insecure, fallen state, creates in every person the need (or at least the desire) to exalt oneself at the expense of another. Such a perspective leads to exclusivity, ethnocentricity, and often hostility towards the “Other.”

The doctrine of creation carries over as well to our understanding of cultures (see below as well). Cultures, like the human beings who make them up, carry with them the beauty of God’s creation and the evils of sin’s effects. As a result, no culture is perfect, no culture is superior, and all cultural expressions must be relativized and evaluated by the standards of Scripture.

Redemption for the Nations. This is our third essential biblical theme that leaders must understand. The Table of Nations, the call of Abram, the election of Israel, and the New Testament Church all point together to affirm that God’s redemptive plan is for all peoples, tribes, ethnicities, and nations. The failure to see “all peoples” as recipients of the redemptive invitation of God leads the people of God into unbiblical exclusivism. However, God witnesses throughout the Scriptures that he is Lord of the nations, and that he desires the day when all peoples and cultures are united under Christ in marvelous, multi-cultural worship.

Reconciliation through the Cross of Christ. To accomplish this united-in-diversity family of the redeemed, Jesus had to come and die.

Leaders – many of who might have become Christians under the influence of a highly individualistic Western presentation of the Gospel, need to be reminded that Jesus' sacrificial death was not only to reconcile us to God but to each other.

Forgiveness through Jesus is not so that we and our people experience the benefits of salvation alone. He reconciles us through the cross of Christ so that we can view all "Others" through the eyes of reconciliation. Our salvation "eyes" must look upward to the Lord who saves us, but they must also look outward so that we see all of those loved and redeemed by God – from all nations and peoples.

New Creations in the New Humanity. Christ's death on the cross enables us to become new creations in Christ according to II Corinthians 5:17, but this cannot be interpreted individualistically. In Christ, we have a new individual and corporate identity. We are now part of a new household that includes people who are incredibly different than ourselves. This new fellowship is limited to the "not yet" of eschatology. We are not envisioning some futuristic cosmic multi-cultural gathering that exists now only in a mystical sense.

There must be an "already" to the new humanity, something that exists now to express both the ethnic uniqueness of people and people groups in the Body of Christ and the multi-ethnic universality of people whose primary citizenship is "in Christ."

From this group of diverse people, God is building a new community, a globally diverse household, a new humanity. In Christ, we are first and foremost citizens of the Kingdom. Belonging to his family is our ultimate identity. Ethnicity is now made secondary to our primary identity. When the Christian understands his or her citizenship, in the words of the early church document, “The Epistle to Diognetus,” “Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is a foreign country.”⁴³⁸

United Diversity as a Foundation for Mission. Our new multicultural identity in Christ provides the platform for our participation in Jesus’ Great Commission mandates (as a reflection to the church of the Abrahamic Covenant). In order to bless all the nations and ethnicities on earth, Jesus sends us outward to all of these diverse peoples. This mission is most effective when those go are themselves an expression of the answer to Jesus’ prayer for unity in diversity (John 17:21, 23).

United Diversity as a Foundation for Long-Term Hope. While we work today for the experience of the truly united yet truly ethnically diverse expression of the Body of Christ (submitting all of our ethnocentric tendencies to him), we realize that this is indeed a “moment”, a foreshadowing of the ultimate fulfillment of Revelation 7:9, when the multitude that no one can count – from every nation, tribe, people and

⁴³⁸ Quoted in Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 102.

language – gather in heavenly worship of Jesus Christ who saves them all.

An example of transformation in process. One of the participants in the first group taking the “Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity” course is a woman who ministers in Delhi named Shamira Philip. As she has completed the course and understood the Scriptures in a fresh way as it pertains to cross-cultural relations and as it relates to her perspective as a south Indian living in north India, she has articulated the power of the Holy Spirit to use biblical truth to change lives. In September 2006, about six weeks into the course, she wrote concerning her new understanding of her identity in Christ:

The words “kingdom citizens” are becoming a hot favorite in my dictionary. Everyone is almost fed-up. But it's the truth!!! I am NO LONGER INDIAN! I am a child of God, an heiress, a citizen of Jesus' kingdom. This is becoming truth to me everyday!! ...

The biblical perspective on the “Other” led to a subsequent email in October 2006 when she wrote of the continued impact of the course in the ways she views others who are different. Towards the end of the unit 10 and 11 in the course (the units related to Ephesians 2), she wrote again (November, 2006): “I feel I am understanding culture and what God intended culture to be as it relates to the Church. It is tough though because my culture is so strongly integrated with my life. Breaking out of it requires pure grace.”

As Shamira continues to understand transformed identity, she will need to realize that she has awakened to her true identity in Christ (rather than being first defined as an Indian or a Malayalee), but that she will also need to grow to appreciate her cultural identity too, her “particularity” which allows her to offer a unique and beautiful contribution to the overall Body of Christ.

After her first email, I responded by writing, “Shamira, you are indeed a child of God, an heiress, a citizen of Jesus’ kingdom – but you are indeed an Indian. The issue is that Jesus has become your primary identity which both draws on and sanctifies your ‘Indian-ness.’” I reminded her of the reference to becoming a new humanity in Ephesians 2 (related to Units 10 and 11) from William Barclay:

Paul says that Jesus brings together Jew and Gentile and from them both produces one *NEW* kind of person. This is very interesting and very significant; it is not that Jesus makes all the Jews into Gentiles, or all the Gentiles into Jews; he produces a new kind of person out of both, *although they remain Gentiles and Jews*. The unity which Jesus achieves is not achieved by blotting out all racial characteristics; it is achieved by making all men of all nations into Christians.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁹ Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 116.

The course is helping her realize her need to break away from tendencies towards ethnocentricity, but she must now grow towards understanding where her ethnicity fits.

CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

Although all of the missiological implementation of the issues related to culture, ethnicity and diversity are based on the biblical foundations cited above, specific issues need to be raised in training Christian leaders so that they can – in the words of the question we are pursuing – understand the value of ethnicity and culture, embrace the new humanity which Jesus died to create, speak against ethnocentricity, work for reconciliation, and serve as biblical peace-makers?

Issue #1: a deeper understanding of culture. If the goal is affirming cultural and ethnic identity without provoking nationalism and ethnocentrism, leaders need to understand something about culture – especially the way that their own culture has shaped them. Leaders will do this best if they are learning in a multi-cultural context because, in the words of Lesslie Newbigin, “Trying to criticize one’s own culture is like trying to push a bus while you’re sitting on it.”⁴⁴⁰ Our challenge as we train is to help leaders understand the cultural views of others so that they can appreciate the true diversity in the Body of Christ.

⁴⁴⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 95.

Perhaps most challenging in this process is helping leaders identify the more subtle, internal⁴⁴¹ issues of culture which they are most likely unaware of. In the course design, I made accommodation for this through the use of stories, case studies, examination of biblical stories, and the use of movies. Through indirect confrontation of cultural values, my hope is that leaders will begin to address the emotional and unconscious assumptions of culture that most make because “Most cultural clashes happen on the internal unconscious level – on the instinctual level where the parties involved are not even conscious of why they feel and react the way they do.”⁴⁴²

Issue #2: the impact of ethnocentrism on mission strategies.

While only a few of the students who engage in our Development Associates International training are missiologists *per se*, many of them are serving in cross-cultural contexts. As a result, they need to understand the way that ethnocentricity has affected the way that cross-cultural ministry is done. While McGavran’s strategic church growth through the “Homogenous Unit Principle” is an easy target for criticism,

⁴⁴¹ Related to the issue of culture, Eric Law offers insights into the complexity of addressing “external” versus “internal” culture: “External culture is the conscious part of culture. It is the part that we can see, taste, and hear. It consists of acknowledged beliefs and values. It is explicitly learned and can be easily changed. However, this constitutes only a small part of our culture. The major part is the internal part, which consists of the unconscious beliefs, thought patterns, values, and myths that affect everything we do and see. It is implicitly learned and is very hard to change. A good image that can help us understand this better is an iceberg. ... An iceberg has a small visible part above water and a very large and irregular part under the water. The part above water can represent external culture and the part under the surface can represent internal culture. *What I mean by the ‘instinct’ of our culture is this internal part that is not conscious and is very hard to change*” (Law, *The Wolf Shall Lie Down With the Lamb*, 4-5, emphasis added).

⁴⁴² Ibid., 9.

there are other side effects of ethnocentricity which affect our mission's strategy. Consider three.⁴⁴³

1) *The impact of ethnocentricity as it relates to women in leadership.* Ruth Tucker has identified that the use of women in mission leadership is subtly based on racist perspectives towards indigenous Christians. She says it is an issue of racism when women are sent to teach "natives" when they are not allowed to lead in their white, middle-class sending churches. She writes, "The racial imperialism of the past can no longer be tolerated in a worldwide church that is built on mutual respect and partnership."⁴⁴⁴ She goes on to tell the story of a Kenyan student at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School who wondered why American churches restricted women in leadership in this country, while at the same time they commissioned them to go to Africa and other foreign lands to serve in leadership positions. "Was this not racism?"⁴⁴⁵

2) *The impact of ethnocentricity as it relates to "inclusion" versus "tokenism."* Leaders must be instructed on the difference between treating someone as an equal versus inviting their token participation so as to give the appearance of unity-in-diversity. Physically including the powerless and the disadvantage is not enough – especially because most of the minority culture people our leaders serve with come from cultures that em-

⁴⁴³ The limits of the course designed on "Culture, Ethnicity and Diversity" did not allow me to address these three issues specifically, but they are included because they were very much part of the discoveries made in my research.

⁴⁴⁴ Tucker, "Women in Mission," 286.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

phasize the collective over the individual. As individuals, the token participant feels powerless without their community behind them.⁴⁴⁶

3) *The impact of ethnocentricity as it relates to prioritization of strategy in areas like bible translation, local leadership, and church polity.* The Asian mission leader Enoch Wan, writing on how “Ethnocentrism Still Inhibits Missions” cites ethnocentrism as a negative force in guiding even the priorities of translators and church planters. He points to Martin Luther’s disregard for the Book of James (“the straw epistle”), preferring instead Romans and Galatians. Wan explains that “This is a historical example showing the power of prejudice.”⁴⁴⁷ His pattern of preferential treatment of different books of the Bible can still be found in modern missions in prioritizing Bible books for translation.” The disregard for the cultural context of the target ethnic groups by some church-planters may persist in the imposition of their own Christian tradition on new converts in terms of worship and preaching style, discipleship programs, and church policy.⁴⁴⁸

Issue #3: understanding the role of power. The quest for power separates peoples and provides a basis for using ethnic identity as a way to gain power over others. Because many of the leaders we train come either as heads of organizations or as cross-cultural missionaries serving

⁴⁴⁶ See Law, *The Wolf Shall Lie Down With the Lamb*, 34.

⁴⁴⁷ Wan, “Ethnocentrism,” 325.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

in places that are poorer or less sophisticated, we recognize the potential abuse of power in this regard. In light of this, the “Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity” course was built on the basic value of Development Associates International to promote “servant leadership.” I wanted to confront the abuses of power when Christians misinterpret the concept of election or use superior economic or education standing as a foundation for racism (which I defined earlier as ethnocentricity plus power).

Racism of whatever kind, and there are many kinds, is at best dangerous. At worst it is demonically destructive, for the demonic by definition is that which exalts against God and projects itself as though it were God. Theologically understood, racism is a vaulting, arrogant human attempt to seize for itself that special status which in biblical thought is called election. As such, racism is a profound perversion of election, for in biblical definition election belongs to God alone, the God who exalts the humble and casts down the proud.⁴⁴⁹

The issue of power affects our ability to combat ethnocentricity in relation to one of the underlying themes in this research – the issue of intentionality (see Issue #7 below). All leaders should be encouraged to pursue unity in diversity, but in many ethnically divided contexts, the discriminated against (the poor, the ethnic minority, the outcasts, etc.) may be severely limited in their ability to take initiative or be intentional to those

⁴⁴⁹ James Daane, “Racism” in Carl F.H. Henry, ed., *Baker’s Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 565.

who are “Other.” Sociological and cultural structures may make it impossible for people of “lower stature” to assert themselves to people who are culturally and ethnically different – because the society or the traditions will not allow it.

The complexity of this issue of power and intentionality appears in Acts. For the Gentiles to be welcomed into the community of Christian faith, Jewish leaders had to take the initiative (as in Peter with the household of Cornelius).⁴⁵⁰ It was those with culturally-defined status who had to defend the rights of the Gentiles to be equal members of the church.⁴⁵¹ No matter how “intentional” the Gentiles became, they needed the powerful to unlock the door into the church.

Again, this issue of power and intentionality appears in the book of James when he exhorts the rich and powerful to be intentional in their efforts to honor and welcome the poor.⁴⁵² All should be encouraged to pursue people who are culturally or ethnically different, but more responsibility falls on those in positions of power.⁴⁵³ Taking the initiative and being intentional is more readily at their disposal, and this positional power can be used to build bridges between separated peoples.

⁴⁵⁰ Acts 10:23-48.

⁴⁵¹ Acts 11:1-18; 15:1-21; Colossians 2:11.

⁴⁵² James 2:1-9.

⁴⁵³ This principle is very significant in our work with Development Associates International training leaders in India because about half of the leaders we train are from south India working in the north. Their economic and social status (caste) is often higher and as a result, they need special encouragement to use their “power” to facilitate and initiate relations with those from lower positions in society.

Issue #4: understanding and responding to the usefulness and the limits of the homogeneous unit principle. The point advanced by McGavran that ethnic identity and ethnic-specific outreach and church planting is the way to expand the church and the Kingdom may be assumed by many of our course participants, especially our Indian leaders. As a result, I have chosen to have the participants in the course read the Lausanne consultation which critiqued this idea against biblical teaching. The goal is simply to help them realize that while church-planting along ethnic specific lines can be both practical and effective, it is not complete in bringing these churches to maturity where every church member begins to see the “Other” differently, as brothers and sister in the transformed family of God.

The church in a multicultural world is called to bless the nations by valuing persons and cultures in their particularity. God calls us to remind the world of the high value and worth God has placed not only on each person, but on each family, ethnicity, tribe, tongue and nation. We not only pray for the well being of persons, but we also seek to be in relationship with them. Therefore the ministry of blessing can never be an ethnocentric affair; it must be a family affair, as in “all the families of the earth.”⁴⁵⁴

Issue #5: addressing ethnocentrism in context. One of the lessons of the research is that ethnocentrism will vary according to the

⁴⁵⁴ Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet*, 43.

context of the leader, and the way we address it must vary accordingly. Some of those we train through Development Associates International live in the village of their family where their family has lived for generations, and they never intend to move. People in this context provided one of the reasons for the through-the-Bible approach to the training design. I wanted them to know that God had a cross-cultural, multi-ethnic family to which they belonged – even if they were not immediately experiencing it. I wanted them to know that unity-in-diversity is a basic core-value for every disciple in the Kingdom of God.

In the inductive exercises throughout the course, I tried to vary the questions so that it applied to leaders – whether they were village-based or urban-based. For the rural village context, I tried to confront legends and mythology about other peoples from whom they have lived in separation. For the city-dweller, I tried to address ethnocentrism to people who often live in "forced" diversity but have never dealt with their core ethnocentricity that only surfaces in the face of conflict.

Issue #6: issues of history and forgiveness. Learning from history has never been a strength of the Western church, but when confronted with the realities of what occurred in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, today's Christian leader in any context must wrestle with this issue of history as it relates to ethnicity and ethnocentrism. In addition to the matters of historical forgiveness (below), leaders must also wrestle

with the historical issues of what draws people into united-diversity. Arthur Schlesinger affirms the need for some uniting vision:

What happens when people of different ethnic origins, speaking different languages and professing differing religions, settle in the same geographical locality and live under the same political sovereignty? Unless a common purpose binds them together, tribal hostilities will drive them apart. Ethnic and racial conflict, it seems evident, will now replace the conflict of ideologies as the explosive issue of our times.⁴⁵⁵

A pursuit into history identifies the reasons why ethnically diverse people work together.

People unite because they are forced, as in the former USSR and the Balkans – and ethnocentrism is never addressed. Donald R. Jacobs observes that totalitarian socialism or communism forcibly tried to create an “ideological hegemony,” repressing any opportunity for authentic ethnic expression. The leadership of the communist and socialist systems treated ethnicity as a thing of the past. But even under the repression and forced unity, ethnicity both survived and flourished. And then, when the powerful clamps of communism and socialism were removed, ethnicity re-emerged as a major factor in shaping cultural identity. He concludes, “As

⁴⁵⁵ Arthur Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 10.

the breakup of the former Yugoslavia shows, this is not always a positive thing.”⁴⁵⁶

People unite for economic benefit because they believe that the benefits of working together exceed the animosities of nationalism. This often occurs in urban multi-cultural contexts.

People unite because they share a common goal, as in Olympic sports or in “Allies” at war.

People unite because they fear a common enemy, as in the African American “unity” against the white supremacists or image of a unified America fighting against terrorism.

Our challenge is to train leaders who unite for a greater and more dramatic purpose: the eternal priorities of the Kingdom of God. To do this, however, requires that leaders understand something of how to deal with issues like forgiveness, reconciliation, and bridge-building to separated peoples. This is why the “Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity” course spent time on the story of Jonah, the encounter of Peter with Cornelius, and the Lausanne occasional paper (and related case studies) on historical reconciliation.

Miroslav Volf, writing from the experience of the inter-ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia, refers to the Old Testament account of Joseph as an example of the need for oppressed and maligned people to remember the past in order to forgive it and move on. He challenges any

⁴⁵⁶ Jacobs, “Ethnicity,” 323.

who fail to understand why Black Americans or Nazi-oppressed Jews do not just “get over it and move on”, but he also challenges the victims of ethnic hatred to forgive, be reconciled to their past, and embrace the oppressors.

In Joseph’s journey towards reconciliation and forgiveness with his brothers who had sold him into slavery, Joseph realized that the past was behind him because “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house” (41:51). In order to come to that point, Joseph had to go through the process of painful remembering. Volf writes,

Joseph himself was reminded of the suffering his brothers had caused, and subtly but powerfully he made them remember it too (42:21-23; 44:27ff.). Yet, like the distant light of a place called home, the divine gift of forgetting what he still remembered – “backgrounding” the memory might be the right term – guided the whole journey of return.⁴⁵⁷

Volf goes on to point to the amazing paradox that people must go through “remembering in order to forget.” He points to the name Joseph gave his son, Manasseh – “one who causes to be forgotten.” This would stay with Joseph as...

...a paradoxical memorial to forgetting (how can one be reminded to forget without being reminded of what one should forget?),
Manasseh’s presence recalled the suffering in order to draw

⁴⁵⁷ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 139.

attention to the loss of its memory. It is this strange forgetting, still interspersed with indispensable remembering, that made Joseph, the victim, able to embrace his brothers, the perpetrators (45:14-15) – and become theirs and his own savior (46:1ff).⁴⁵⁸

This theme – remembering in order to forgive the past oppressor seems to have brought some healing in South Africa, but many places and people choose only to remember so as to revenge (as in the “Never Forget” sign painted in Mostar, Bosnia- Herzegovina referred to earlier).

The challenge of racial reconciliation presents a huge challenge to Christian leaders living in a world split by ethnic hostilities that may be many generations old.⁴⁵⁹

Booker T. Washington offers an example of how this forgiveness needs to played out in relationships. Washington was born and spent his early years in slavery, but his Christian world view enabled him to choose to forgive those who oppressed him.

I would permit no man, no matter what his color might be, to narrow and degrade my soul by making me hate him. With God's help, I believe that I have completely rid myself of any ill feeling toward the

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ While introducing this course in northern India in August 2006, we showed the movie “*Hotel Rwanda*” as an example of ethnocentrism taken to an extreme. The movie unearthed dormant pain in students who, through their parents or grand-parents, hold the memory of near genocide of their own people during the partitioning of India in the late 1940's. One student from the Sindhi people recounted the story of trainloads of Sindhi people boarding the trains to evacuate West Bengal (Pakistan); when they arrived in the Punjab, all the passengers had been killed.

Southern white man for any wrong that he may have inflicted upon my race.⁴⁶⁰

In more recent mission history, Rachel Saint articulates the Christian perspective on reconciliation. When she was asked why she forgave the Auca men, she replied:

You see, for us to be willing to live with them cut straight across their pattern of revenge. They killed our men. Dayuma's brother had killed my brother. Yet we were asking to live with them instead of taking our revenge. Then one day they found that our men had had guns with them when they were attacked and that they could have defended their lives. But they chose to die rather than shoot the Indians. Nothing less than this kind of commitment would have broken the Auca's cultural mindset.⁴⁶¹

The goal in Christian leadership training is to prepare modern-day Josephs, Booker T. Washingtons, and Rachel Saints, leaders who can give full appreciation to a past history of hurt or oppression and then forgive so as to move on.

Issue #7: the need for leadership. The concept of intentionality (below) underscores the need for Christian leader with the integrity and character to speak into the darkness of ethnic hatred. Dr. David Zac

⁴⁶⁰ Peart, *Separate No More*, 173.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 114 quoting a *Christianity Today* interview with Rachel Saint (January 1976), 14-16.

Niringiye, assistant Anglican Bishop of Kampala, Uganda, writing of the situation in central Africa, writes:

What is needed in Burundi, as in many African nations and indeed today's conflict ridden world, is visionary, courageous and selfless leadership, committed to redressing the injustices created by previous generations of leaders; leaders who will create conditions and initiate programs of affirmative action, leveling the ground of access to socio-political privilege.This is the vision of our work in Burundi and indeed all of Africa, together with the Churches, building leadership committed to recovering, incarnating and proclaiming the whole gospel.⁴⁶²

The ultimate goal of this training is to stir leaders to be the people who can serve the Kingdom as leaders in reconciliation, human rights, peace-making, and catalysts for effective multi-cultural ministry.

PRACTICAL MINISTRY ACTIONS

In addition to the biblical themes that serve as foundations for world-view change and practical missiological issues which affect the ways that ministry is undertaken in multi-cultural settings, four practical ministry tools have emerged throughout this research.

1) *Intentionality*. If we are going to affirm the value of people's ethnic identities yet work to combat ethnocentric separation, leaders must

⁴⁶² Personal correspondence, December 2002.

take action – connecting, relating and developing cross-cultural relationships of mutuality, of accountability and of service. We must make building a multi-cultural, united-in-diversity congregation a priority in our churches and Christian fellowships. We must become uncomfortable with our bounded identities because we find security in them from prejudice and hostility, but for Christians a further calling to find true unity in the diversity of God's house as our gift to this divided world must make us explore beyond our cultural boundaries.

2) *Table Fellowship*. Following the example of Peter with Cornelius, we must encourage leaders, fellowships, and congregations to pursue the New Testament practice of table fellowship. In the Majority World, eating together is a sign of equality, respect, and even belonging (as in a family).

Peter's encounter with Cornelius foreshadows the great wedding feast in Revelation. Is it stretching the text too far to affirm that this great multi-cultural table fellowship is an expression of the unity-in-diversity Jesus intends? The experiences cited earlier of Nico Smith in breaking down the dividing walls between Whites and Blacks in South Africa was based simply on this principle. He called the ministry "Koinonia" because he believed, if we can get people to sit and eat together at the same table, walls will come down and perhaps reconciliation can begin.

While researching this material and introducing the course in India in 2006, we encouraged the course participants to try out the idea of table

fellowship. One of the course participants served as part of a multi-cultural team through Emmanuel Hospital Association in Bihar, India. After reading the Unit in the “Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity” course on Peter and Cornelius, he decided to invite each member of his team to prepare an ethnic meal that was distinct to his or her region of India and/or ethnic group.

He wrote, “The results were amazing. We had each person bring an ethnic specific dish and then explain why it was important to his or her people. It helped us understand each other more and it told us something of each other’s story. I don’t know why we never did this before, but the simple action of eating each other’s food brought us closer than we had ever been.”⁴⁶³

3) *Exercises in affirming the “Other.”* The power of verbal affirmation affects both the speaker and the listener. To foster greater appreciation of the “Other,” the research for this course has led to two practical exercises. First, in the early sections of the course introduction, I encouraged people to find three other people who were from a different ethnicity, nationality, or race and then look them in the eye and simply state, “You are created in the image of God.”

The second exercise involved paraphrasing I Corinthians 12 using cultures or ethnicities instead of spiritual gifts. The goal is for people to think about other surrounding cultures, identify particular strengths, and

⁴⁶³ Personal correspondence with Ballu Balbahadur, October 10, 2006.

then appreciate them as an expression of the creative genius of God. One group in our Delhi cohort provided this light-hearted but effective version of such affirmation:

The body is not only Malayalee, but also Oriya and Bengali and Telegu, and we have all been made into one body in Christ. Life has many aspects, each one needing and leading to the other, and the different parts of the body are needed to contribute to this holistic function.

Bengal's football team is its strength; the Oriyas cook good food; the Malayalee has an enterprising spirit; and the Telegus make good music. If Bengal's football team does not eat Oriya food, how will they get their strength? And from where will the Oriya get his food without the enterprising nature of the Malayalee? And how will the Malayalee enterpriser work without recreation provided by Telegu music? So no football without food, no food without work, no work without recreation!⁴⁶⁴

4) *Language*. Following on the theme of affirmation, the use of language has arisen as a powerful reminder that we can humanize or dehumanize the “Other” through the words we use. Jesus’ judgment on the use of “Raca” or “fool” reminds us of the way that words communicate hostility towards fellow human beings created in the image of God.

⁴⁶⁴ Submitted August 9, 2006 by the small group from the Delhi cohort led by Dr. Helen Thomas.

This theme arose early in the course, first through the viewing of the movie *Hotel Rwanda*. The ethnocentric Hutus who were leading the efforts to eradicate the Tutsis and the moderate Hutus made it a point never called them humans. In their propaganda, they called them “cockroaches.” Why? Because virtually no one suffers any ethical remorse over killing a cockroach.

The significance of language as a tool used to dehumanize the “Other” arose when our Delhi cohort was investigating the work of Christ as described in Ephesians 2. I asked them to study the text and answer the question, “What has Jesus done on the cross that effects our horizontal relationships (i.e., with each other)?” One group responded, “Jesus has destroyed name-calling.” They went on to explain that the unity of the body of Christ now meant that the Jews could no longer speak in a derogatory fashion about the Gentiles anymore, despising them as “the uncircumcised.”⁴⁶⁵ Now that we are one new humanity, we must speak affirmatively of each other.

The challenge of our ethnocentrically divided world is for Christian leaders who will speak prophetically into evils of our inter-racial and ethnocentricity-based separations. My hope is that this material and the resultant course will strengthen Christian leaders to address the embedded evil of ethnocentricity in ourselves, in our churches and in our

⁴⁶⁵ Ephesians 2:11.

cultures. Starting with the transformation of leaders, our prayer is that these leaders will cast the vision for united-diversity in their churches, their Christian organizations, and their societies

In this globalized, multi-cultural world in which our local churches serve, Jesus says,

Love one another... As I in my willingness to indigenize and universalize the love of God have loved you, do the same in the multi-ethnic, multi-racial fellowship of believers. By this will all the diverse peoples on earth will know that you are my truly my disciples, if you love one another.⁴⁶⁶

May God humble us from our pride and the desire to exert our identity at the expense of the "Other." May we learn to see others as God sees them.

⁴⁶⁶ My paraphrase of John 13:33-34.

APPENDIX 1

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Typically two of the Development Associates International M.A. courses are introduced over a five-day residency period, so the facilitator for each course will have five half-day sessions with the group of participants. Some of the materials here are perfunctory, but I include them to illustrate the mechanics of how the course has been introduced.

SESSION 1:

- *Group introductions:* I collected the following information on each participant (including auditors)
 - Name
 - Email address (and alternates)
 - Contact (i.e., mailing) information
 - Tell me about your family
 - Tell me about your work (and/or ministry)
- *Professor introduction*
- ***Teacher's Note re: seven residency exercises:*** some of these are adaptations of exercises in the workbook, but most are specific to the residency.

- *GROUP RESIDENCY EXERCISE #1: IDENTIFY YOURSELF* (see Unit 1, p. 8 and p. 22⁴⁶⁷).
 - Introduce yourself to one other person and tell that person 5 or 6 things about yourself. Then, after reviewing each other's lists, ask which of these identifiers are "external", defined by others, and/or subject to change (i.e., assigned to you by someone or something external to yourself) – your job; your age; your location; your education; your accomplishments. And then ask if any of these things are internal and permanent (not subject to change) – most notably "I am a child of God."
 - Main idea: external versus internal identity ("in Christ")
- *Read together and discuss the introductory Case Studies*
 - Unit 1, pages 9-13
- *Go over "**Definition of Terms**"*
 - Unit 1, pages 17-20
- *General Words About the Course*
 - We hope that this course will challenge you in at least three ways
 - First, we hope it will challenge you *intellectually*:
 - Write and ask if words/terms are unclear
 - Ask questions through our email interactions

⁴⁶⁷ Pagination references in the Facilitators Guide refer to the complete course manual for the Development Associates International version 1.3 of the course "Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity."

- Note that this course has more readings and assignments than some – so try to keep on schedule so that you don't fall behind.
- Second, we hope it will challenge you ***socially***
 - You will be asked to reach out across normally accepted cultural barriers
 - You'll be asked to be like Peter (Acts 10) and eat with people you've never shared a meal with before.
 - You'll be asked to change your view of the "Other"
 - It could be a prophetic word to you to look at the process of discipleship in ways that help you understand that salvation is about our relationships with each other as well as our relationship to God.
- Third, we hope that it will challenge you ***theologically***
 - This is why the course is structured around a journey through the Scriptures.
- *Teachers note:* now is a good time to review the Table of Contents so that people see that course goes through the Bible as follows:
 - Unit 1: Introduction
 - Unit 2-5: Genesis and the Pentateuch
 - Unit 6: Jonah (as well as Old Testament Joseph)

- Unit 7: The ministry of Jesus
- Units 8-9: Acts
- Units 10-11: Ephesians 2
- Unit 12: Revelation
- Unit 13: Summary and “action plan”
 - It will force you to recognize God’s love for all people in a new way that transcends cultural norms
 - It will force you to restructure relationships in your church, community or workplace in ways that more accurately reflect God’s heart
- **Homework** for session 3:
 - *GROUP RESIDENCY EXERCISE #2: MEET THE “OTHER”*
 - In groups of two, go out and introduce yourselves to someone in the surrounding area whom you would not normally talk to. This should be someone who is “Other” to you – even the modern day equivalent to a “Samaritan.” This could be a person separated from you by economic standing, caste, race, ethnicity, religion, or culture (in most cultures, it’s wisest to keep these introductions the same along gender lines – but let the class decide this).
 - Introduce yourself as part of this class

- Get to know anything they want to tell you
 - Remember, the goal is simply to interact with them as a fellow human being created in the image of God (i.e., it's not an evangelistic exercise).
- *Read Ephesians 2:11-22*

SESSION 2:

- *Feedback on the exercise of interviewing someone who is “Other”*
- Introduce the video *“My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding”*⁴⁶⁸
 - Explain that it is not a Christian movie
 - Some implicit immorality in a pre-marriage state
 - **Detail note:** before showing the movie, program it in such a way that English subtitles are on screen; it helps listeners read and grasp the dialogue more accurately.
- *Questions to answer as you watch:*
 - What do you observe as cultural differences and potential for conflict between the Greeks and others?
 - What examples do you see of one cultural feeling superior to another (i.e., people from one culture looking down at others in an effort to feel better about themselves)?

⁴⁶⁸ To introduce this course, I chose to use two popular movies to get the participants discussing cultural and ethnic issues. The first – *“My Big Fat Greek Wedding”* – was chosen because it is a lighthearted identification of some of the issues when cultures clash around institutions like family, church, and marriage. The second (session 4) – *“Hotel Rwanda”* – was chosen because of its docu-drama depiction of historical events which vividly show what can happen when ethnocentricity goes unchecked.

- How do the cultures begin to learn from each other or appreciate each other?
- How do the differences get resolved?
- **Teacher's note** – as you reflect on the story, point out to students how the Greek culture is depicted as “alone” throughout the movie – in the neighborhood, at the wedding, at the reception. The imagery tells us something about how cultures who find themselves in the minority in a majority culture. Sometimes their actions of “superiority” are simply because they feel alone and isolated, and they are trying to find themselves in a majority culture where they feel invisible.

SESSION 3:

- *Background to the course and the course author* (see Unit 1, p. 7 and Unit 2, p. 4)
- *GROUP RESIDENCY EXERCISE #3: THE WORK OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS: EPHESIANS 2:11-22*
 - Read through this passage and make a list of all the things that Jesus death on the cross has done for us – both vertically (in our relationship with God) and horizontally (in our relationship with each other)
- **Teacher's note:** Vertically:
 - Jesus has made peace for us with God.
 - Jesus has reconciled us to God.

- Jesus has given all of us equal access to God.
- Jesus has destroyed the hostility between us and God.

Horizontally:

- Jesus has included the Gentiles with the Jews.
- Jesus has brought the “far off” Gentiles to being near.
- Jesus has made us no longer aliens and strangers.
- Jesus has reconciled us to each other, breaking down the “dividing wall of hostility” that separated Jews and Gentiles.
- Jesus has created:
 - One new humanity out of two separated peoples.
 - A new citizenship.
 - A new holy temple made up of all of us together.
 - A Holy-Spirit occupied dwelling.
- *Limits of the course* (see Unit 1, p. 26).
- ***FIVE MAIN IDEAS TO WRESTLE WITH THROUGHOUT THE COURSE*** (see also Unit 1, top of page 8 (“Some personal convictions”) and then the four ideas on Unit 1, p. 22.
 - ***FIRST BIG IDEA: Culture.***
 - We’ll wrestle with the reality that all peoples are “created in the image of God.
 - We’ll examine the way that the Gospel is both the “prisoner and liberator” of culture (see the article by Andrew Walls at the end of Unit 1).

- We'll be challenged to see culture as part of God's creation and as a gift from God – to the point that we'll realize that all cultures have something to teach us about God's revealed character.

- ***SECOND BIG IDEA: Identity and Ethnicity***

- ***Quotation related to identity you can use:***

Ministry without this sense of identity, security, and significance that comes from God's acceptance of us can be very dangerous.

History has shown that often people who work hard and climb to the top have deep-seated insecurities. Their sense of inadequacy drove them to compensate for the insecurity by working hard to be successful... If we minister without this security in Christ, our insecurity could express itself in various ways. Often such Christians look to other people and to ministry as the primary source of their identity and affirmation...Such people need to become children of the King before they become servants of the people.⁴⁶⁹

- We'll examine the difference between an externally-defined identity (which is transient and subject to change) versus an internally defined identity (unchanging because we are first and foremost "in Christ").

⁴⁶⁹ Ajith Fernando, *Jesus-Driven Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 57-58.

- We'll see how the affect of sin causes us to find our identity at the expense of others – which breaks down human relationships and leads to ethnocentricity and racism.
- We'll see that the challenge for Christians is to let Jesus define all other identities.
- Example: I am a “Christian” who happens to be American; i.e., my Christian commitment defines my Americanness – not the other way around.
- We'll be challenged to make Jesus our “supreme identity” – over nationality, ethnicity, etc.

- ***Quotation related to identity you can use:***

Christian identity starts from the premise that in Jesus Christ God is creating a new humanity whose identity is not dependent on any of the usual elements: race, language, social class, territory, or nationality. All of these are among the powers that must be relativized and transformed by the work of Christ. That is to say, these elements are not abolished but are brought into captivity to the purposes of Jesus Christ. Christian identity will based on the decisive reconciling action of God in Jesus Christ to create a new humanity (Eph. 2:15). In the quest to embrace authentic Christian identity, no one culture is privileged over other cultures. Within the economy of the new humanity, all cultures are valued equally and

are worthy of respect. Cultural and ethnic diversity becomes a means by which the richness and glory of God's grace is more perfectly revealed to us.⁴⁷⁰

- ***THIRD BIG IDEA: The work of Christ on the cross in giving us a new identity.***

- We'll look closely at Ephesians 2:11-22 and ask the question, "What does it mean that Jesus' death "breaks down the dividing walls?"
- What will the one new humanity that God is creating really look like in practice?

- ***FOURTH BIG IDEA: Forgiveness and Reconciliation***

- We'll examine Jonah and realize that one group's oppression of others leads to long-term hatred and animosity.
- We'll learn about people who have been willing to forgive so that bad history can be overcome and relationships can be healed.

- ***FIFTH BIG IDEA: Intentionality***

- What will we do with all this?
- Our course will not merely serve cognitive knowledge; instead, we'll be looking throughout the course for ways to take intentional steps to achieve the unity-in-diversity

⁴⁷⁰ Wilbert R. Shenk, "Recasting Theology of Mission: Impulses from the Non-Western World," in *The International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (July 2001), 100.

of cultures and ethnicities that God describes in Revelation 5:9 and 7:9.

- We'll be challenged to be actively involved in the work of reconciliation in our cross-cultural friendships, in our workplaces, in our communities, and in our Christian fellowships.

○ *GROUP RESIDENCY EXERCISE #4: THE GOOD SAMARITAN.*

- Ask for a group of 4 or 5 volunteers and ask for them to act out the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).
- After they do this, discuss as a group:
 - Who are the Samaritans in your world?
 - Who are the religious leaders?
 - What is the lesson of this parable in your cultural setting?
- **Teacher's note:** it's worth pointing out to the class that the parable follows the sending out of the 70, an action that most commentators point to as Jesus' assignment to go across cultures to all the nations (the general thought of that day was that there are 70 nations on earth (based on Genesis 10:29 ff)).
- **Homework** for session 5:

- Look over the assignments and assignment schedule – bring your questions.
- Look over the book reading – bring your questions.

SESSION 4:

- *GROUP RESIDENCY EXERCISE #5: EXPERIENCES IN*

DISCRIMINATION:

- Try to think of a time when you have been discriminated against because of any number of reasons – race, ethnicity, gender, skin color, age, caste or economic standing.
- As you reflect on these experiences, ask
 - How did you feel when others looked down on you – especially if you were being looked down upon because of something over which you had no control?
 - How did the experience shape your opinion of the person who was discriminating against you?
 - How did you respond?
- *Read from Unit 1, pp. 20-21 – concerning the way we find our identity at the expense of others.*
- *Introduce the video “Hotel Rwanda.”*
 - Explain that it is not a Christian movie.
 - There’s quite a bit of violence so brace yourselves.

- ***The main reason we are watching this*** is because it's a severe example of what happens when the issue of ethnicity is not addressed from a Christian perspective.
- ***It also illustrates*** the worst form of “my identity at your expense” because this is what killing and genocide is – my people feeling good about themselves as your people are eradicated.
- ***Detail note:*** before showing the movie, program it in such a way that English subtitles are on screen; it helps listeners grasp the dialogue more accurately.
- ***Introduction to the 1994 crisis in Rwanda.***⁴⁷¹
 - Rwanda is generally seen as the place where the “East African Revival” began in 1936; this was a movement that led to millions of people becoming Christians.
 - As a result, Rwanda was seen as one of the great “success stories” of missions. At the time of the 1994 tragedies, somewhere between 80% to 90% of the people considered themselves Christians. Even if we assume a large amount of nominalism, most agree that at least 5% of the country were devout Christians.

⁴⁷¹ Many of these facts are from J.J. Kritzinger, “*The Rwandan Tragedy as Public Indictment Against Christian Mission*,” from *Missionalia* (the journal of the South American Missiological Society). The article is found at: <http://www.geocities.com/missionalia/rwanda1.htm?200625>.

- The tension between Hutus and Tutsis related to ethnicity, power (the colonialists basically gave the minority Tutsis the power), and historical lack of trust.
- Racial conflicts arose in 1959-61 and 1972-73. The latter dates included an attempted genocide of the Hutus by the Tutsis in Burundi (the neighboring country); thousands of Hutus were killed – a fact that fueled the fire of genocide-driven Hutus in 1994.
- Perhaps the saddest part of the Rwanda story was the involvement of Christians in the killing – choosing their ethnic identity over their belonging together to the family of Christ. The East African Revival did address some of the issues of reconciliation, but the massacres of 1994 revealed that many did not understand that accepting and being reconciled to Christ also meant accepting and being reconciled to the “Other.”
- Although there were Christians on both sides who acted heroically and defended those from the other ethnicity, most agree that part of the problem was that the Christians were divided on ethnic lines between “us” and “them.”
- Somewhere between 800,000 and 1,000,000 people were killed – most were either ethnic Tutsis or moderate Hutus. A UNICEF study revealed that half of Rwanda’s children witnessed the killing of children by other children. More than half had to stand

by while family members were killed. And more than 80% of the people were displaced as they fled for their lives.

- *Questions to answer as you watch:*
 - What is at the core of the cultural conflict?
 - How does one group exert power over the other?
 - What role does derogatory language play in the way that one group denigrates the other?
 - Why does the hero get involved?
 - How – if at all – do the differences get resolved?

SESSION 5:

- *GROUP RESIDENCY EXERCISE #6: I CORINTHIANS 12:*

CELEBRATING OUR DIFFERENCES:

- In groups of 3 or 4, identify your respective cultural or ethnic or national heritage. Then read together I Corinthians 12:14-26. Now go back to your cultural or ethnic heritage and ask, “What positive strengths are characteristics of my people?” Then, after each one shares strengths from his or her own tradition or culture or ethnicity, paraphrase I Corinthians 12:14-26 substituting cultures or ethnicities or nationalities – all with the goal of understanding that:
 - We need each other and...

- Each culture or ethnicity in the Body of Christ brings strengths to build up the entire body.
- Ex. “The church in the USA cannot say to the church in Bangladesh, “I have no need of you. If the whole church was characterized by the USA, who would teach us endurance in the face of hardship? But if the whole church took on the hardship perspective of the church in Bangladesh, where would the enthusiasm come from?”
- Go over assignments and questions.
- Go over readings and questions.
- Close with a positive exercise to send them off with an anticipation of hope that God can and will unite the diverse cultures and make a church that is truly a “mosaic” of cultures.
- *GROUP RESIDENCY EXERCISE #7: “UNITY IN DIVERSITY.”*
 - In groups: Can you identify times in the Church or in your nation where “barriers” have been broken down and people have been able to celebrate a “unity-in-diversity” – either based on their oneness in Christ or based simply on their common humanity? As you think about these times, ask the question, what brought people together?
- **Teacher’s note:** Examples could include things like:
 - Rich and poor, healthy and lepers at the Lord’s Table.

- Christian conferences where linguistic, cultural, or denominational differences are minimized and a commitment to common worship or mission gets emphasized.
 - Christian services using multiple languages so as to include everyone.
 - The United States after 9/11/01 – united around disaster or common grief.
 - People helping each other after a natural disaster – tsunami, floods, etc.
 - Nations united around sports-related victories – football, rugby, cricket.
 - Nations united around patriotic themes like “Independence Day.”
- **THREE TYPES OF RESPONSES** (*Unit 1, pp. 15-16*): *what will YOU do with this course?*

APPENDIX 2**SAMPLE FINAL EXAM QUESTIONS**

The first location where students who have completed the course will be tested is Allahabad University in India. This University sponsors the M.A. that we teach, and their procedure is that the facilitator of each course must present three sets of relevant questions for the course – from which their administrators will chose a set to be used as a Final Exam. I offer these questions simply to show the priority that I have assigned to certain aspects or themes in the course.

QUESTION SET #1

- 1) _____ When Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3), Adam immediately blamed “the woman” and then God. In terms of relationships, his reaction demonstrates the truth that sin causes:
 - a. Hostility between people
 - b. The tendency to start looking down on others we perceive as inferior
 - c. The tendency to find our identity at the expense of another
 - d. ***Sin causes all of these relationships to break down***

- 2) _____ When the people at the Tower of Babel tried to build their own security apart from God, God dispersed them by confusing their languages. God’s ***primary positive purpose*** in doing this was:

a. ***He was pushing humanity to fulfill His cultural mandate to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth***

b. He was opposed to large towers

c. He wanted to baffle the human race

d. He was opposed to unity

3) _____ Jonah rejected God's command to go and preach to the Ninevites because:

a. He was afraid of the people of Nineveh

b. He wanted to go preach in Tarshish instead

c. ***He hated the Ninevites and did not want them to experience God's mercy***

d. He thought Nineveh was too far away

4) _____ When the Pharisee prays in Luke 18, "I thank you God that I am not like other men – like this tax collector," what behavior is he demonstrating?

a. Pharisees and tax-collectors were competing for God's love

b. The Pharisee was resenting the taxes he had to pay

c. ***Identity at the expense of another***

d. Tension between the rich and the poor in Jesus' times

5) _____ The foundational problem with the United Nations

Declaration of Human Rights is that:

- a. The United Nations is powerless to enforce it
- b. *The declaration fails to present the biblical “created in the image of God” mandate that makes all people equal***
- c. Signatories to the Declaration do not abide by it
- d. No one knows what it means

6) _____ In Acts 10, what was the primary lesson that Peter learned about God through his meal with Cornelius?

- a. *That God is the God of all cultures and Christian faith is for all people***
- b. That eating with Gentiles is OK
- c. That visiting the homes of Gentiles is OK
- d. That staying at the home of a Gentile was OK

7) _____ Taking initiative to make our workplace more ethnically diverse, or recruit more diverse leaders in our church, or create more diverse styles of worship is called:

- a. Incarnational ministry
- b. Integrational ministry
- c. *Intentionality***
- d. Investigational ministry

8) _____ After the Azusa Street Revivals and the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement, the founders taught that the **first** sign of being filled with the Holy Spirit is:

- a. Speaking in tongues
- b. Racial reconciliation**
- c. Sign and wonders
- d. Healings

9) _____ The concept of “Otherness” refers to:

- a. People we think are aliens from outer space
- b. People from whom we are separated and whom we oppose because of cultural, ethnic, historical or other differences**
- c. Anyone outside of our immediate family
- d. All people from other countries

10) _____ To say “Christ is my first (or supreme) identity” means:

- a. We should always be firm in calling ourselves “Christians”
- b. People should change their names when they become Christians
- c. Our identity of being “in Christ” supersedes all other identities**
- d. Being Christian means that we are superior to other people

11) _____ The concept of “particularity” refers to the fact that Christianity:

- a. ***Can become “captive” (contextualized) to the culture that embraces it***
- b. Is very particular in who is allowed to join the church
- c. Teaches that Jesus is the only way to God
- d. That we should stay isolated in our particular cultures

12) _____ What does the concept of “Homogenous Unit Principle” refer to?

- a. A principle related to the process of purifying milk
- b. A principle related to requiring people to live in mono-cultural areas
- c. ***A principle related to outreach and church-planting along ethnic, cultural, and other similar affinities***
- d. A principle used to explain why most people marry along caste lines

13) _____ Read the following I Corinthians 12 paraphrase

"The body is not only Malayalee, but also Oriya and Bengali and Telegu, and we have all been made into one body in Christ. Life has many aspects, each one needing and leading to the other, and the different parts of the body are needed to contribute to this holistic function.

“Bengal's football team is its strength, the Oriyas cook good food, the Malayalee has an enterprising spirit, and the Telegus make good music. If Bengal's football team does not eat Oriya food, how will they get their strength? And from where will the Oriya get his food without the enterprising nature of the Malayalee? And how will the Malayalee enterpriser work without recreation provided by Telegu music? So no football without food, no food without work, no work without recreation!"

What does it mean?

a. In the church, every person from every culture needs each other

- b. India has a lot of cultures
- c. Sports, cooking, and business management are spiritual gifts
- d. People across India should be nicer to each other

14) _____ Peter helped open the door for the Gospel to Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles, but he indicated that he still did not understand the idea of our being united as one new humanity when he:

- a. Resisted God's call to go visit Cornelius
- b. Referred to the Jew/Gentile separation as "them" and "us"
- c. Returned to Jewish dietary habits and alienated the Gentiles
- d. He did all of these things**

15) _____ Which of the following is NOT something that typically factors into the definitions of what constitutes "ethnicity?"

- a. Common culture, language, or other traditions
- b. A link with a homeland
- c. ***A sense of power over some other ethnic group***
- d. A common sense of history or heritage

ESSAY QUESTIONS: set #1

- 1) The movie “Hotel Rwanda” shows one people referring to their enemies as “cockroaches.” What is the role of language in dehumanizing the “Other”?
 - 2) When Andrew Walls refers to the Gospel as both “prisoner” and “liberator” of culture, what is he referring to?
 - 3) What is the role of multi-cultural leadership in helping us realize local fellowships which reflect God’s design for multi-cultural congregations?
 - 4) Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 give us an image of the future as God designs and defines it. What do these pictures of worship tell us about God’s multi-cultural plan for the church?
 - 5) What is the difference between “ethnicity” and “ethnocentricity”?
-

QUESTION SET #2

- 1) _____ Ethnocentricity gets expressed by:
- a. Jokes or teasing of people from another ethnicity
 - b. Violence against people from another ethnicity
 - c. Feeling superior to other cultures, like one's own culture is at the center of the world
 - d. ***All of these things could be expressions of ethnocentricity***
- 2) _____ In working towards reconciliation between peoples who have hurt each other in the past, the phrase "hatred that is sleeping" refers to the fact that:
- a. There's no more hatred between the people
 - b. ***There may be apparent peace, but the true, unresolved hostility is "sleeping" and could be awakened in a conflict***
 - c. The people are living in the same community so everything must be OK between them
 - d. The sons and daughters are intermarrying so there must be peace between the ethnic groups
- 3) _____ In Genesis 12, God promises that Abram – as the father of faith – would be a blessing:
- a. To his family
 - b. To the twelve tribes of Israel

c. To all Christians everywhere

d. *To all the peoples and ethnic groups of the earth*

4) _____ The biblical teaching that we are “in Christ” relates to the subject of ethnic identity because it teaches us:

a. That Christian culture destroys our ethnic or cultural background

b. *That our cultural and ethnic identity can be celebrated, but it must be made secondary to our belonging to the Christian family*

c. That we can keep every aspect of our cultural and ethnic background without change – even after becoming a Christian

d. That church culture should be reflective of the dominant culture

5) _____ In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commands us not to call someone else a “fool.” Why?

a. *It dehumanizes the “Other” with language so that we can treat them meanly*

b. “Fool” is a four-letter word

c. Calling someone a fool in Jesus time was like calling them a monkey

d. Because they might call us a fool back

6) _____ In one of the case studies about Rwanda after the genocide, the woman whose husband had been killed expressed true reconciliation and forgiveness by:

- a. Moving to another country to start her life over
- b. Pretending like nothing had ever happened
- c. *Accepting the murderers confession, forgiving him and receiving him as her own son***
- d. Accepting a large sum of money as payment

7) _____ Which of the following is an example of “intentionality” in terms of creating cultural diversity?

- a. Inviting a pastor from another ethnic group to speak
- b. Celebrating worship with a song written by people from another culture or in another language
- c. Reciting the Lord’s Prayer in all the languages of the community
- d. *All of these are examples of intentionality***

8) _____ The concept of “identity at the expense of others” refers to:

- a. Charging other people money to force them to build up our sense of identity
- b. Buying illegal identity cards
- c. *Exalting ourselves over others by believing that we (or our cultural or ethnic group) is superior to them (theirs)***

d. Teasing someone else

9) _____ In the Christian community, I need to listen to my brother or sister from another culture because:

a. It's required for salvation

b. *This person has some understanding about God from their own cultural perspective that can teach me*

c. Their daughter might marry my son

d. They might have good music to offer our worship experience

10) _____ Perhaps the most significant thing a church can do to foster a wider sense of cultural diversity – following the example of the church in Antioch (Acts 13) – is to:

a. Spend more time in prayer

b. Spend more time in fasting

c. Send more missionaries

d. *Intentionally pursue more ethnic diversity in the leadership team*

11) _____ When Andrew Walls refers to Jesus' "particularity" and "universality", he is highlighting the fact that:

a. Jesus exemplified a full example of life

b. Jesus came for all people, but he came as a man from a particular culture at a particular time

- c. Jesus came even though he had created the universe
- d. Jesus was very particular about the people he came from

12) _____ When God speaks through Isaiah and says that caring exclusively for the Jews was “too small of a thing” (Isaiah 49:7), what was God demonstrating?

- a. He didn’t care for the Jews
- b. He wanted to start working with other people
- c. He was stating his multicultural plans for Jewish outreach**
- d. He wanted Isaiah to be a foreign missionary

13) _____ To illustrate that Jesus’ death on the cross brings reconciliation to people separated by ethnic division, Paul, in Ephesians 2, says that Jesus’ death:

- a. Breaks down the dividing walls of hostility
- b. Makes diverse people into fellow citizens of Christ’s kingdom
- c. Creates out of different groups one new humanity
- d. Jesus death on the cross accomplishes all of these things**

14) _____ The story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10) gives us several principles of intentionality. Which of these are NOT one of these principles?

- a. Eat meals together
- b. *Let your children intermarry***
- c. Listen to each others testimonies
- d. Prayerful preparation

15) _____ The phrase in Galatians 3:28-29 that in Christ we are “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female” indicates:

- a. That Jesus really wants uniformity where we have no distinctions
- b. That all roles in society should be dissolved
- c. *That we are all equal in Christ***
- d. That everyone in the church should be a leader

ESSAY QUESTIONS: set #2

1) When building the church towards a greater expression of diversity, what does it mean to practice the concept of “intentionality”?

2) In the “United Nations Declaration of Human Rights”, there is no expressed foundation for believing that we’re all equal. What is the problem with this?

- 3) Explain the concept of being “in Christ” as our primary identity and ethnicity as our secondary identity?
- 4) Thinking of Ephesians 2:11-17, identify aspects of the work of Christ as to how it affects both our vertical relationship (with God) and our horizontal relationships (with others).
- 5) Discuss how history, forgiveness and reconciliation play a part in helping the church move towards united diversity.

QUESTION SET #3

- 1) _____ Racism differs from “ethnocentricity” in this respect:
 - a. Racism refers specifically to color of skin
 - b. Racism refers only to the Black-White issues of the USA
 - c. Ethnocentricity is only about ethnic issues and has nothing to do with skin color
 - d. ***Racism refers to ethnocentricity but adds the element of one group having power over another***
- 2) _____ The biblical creation story is fundamental to building inter-cultural understanding because it affirms that:
 - a. Creation happened in seven days
 - b. God created man before woman

c. God created cultures

d. God created ALL people in his image

3) _____ Tradition says that the architects of American slavery defined Africana as 60% human. What was their motive?

a. They were judging the intelligence of Africans

b. They were judging the wealth of Africans

c. They were establishing laws so that they could treat Africans as less than human

d. They were judging the working ability of Africans

4) _____ What does the concept of being “color blind” mean in the context of inter-cultural relations?

a. Being unable to choose matching clothes

b. Pretending that the color of a person’s skin is their most important characteristic

c. Pretending that everyone is the same – no matter what their cultural or ethnic or racial identity

d. Being unable to tell what country a dark-skinned person comes from

5) _____ Theologians believe that the many languages and cultures present at Pentecost (Acts 2) was an expression of:

- a. A God-created fulfillment of the united diversity that humans tried to create at the Tower of Babel
- b. A foreshadowing of the multi-cultural, multi-language Church that God wants
- c. A preview of the worship of heaven.
- d. *All of the above***

6) _____ In building greater cultural understanding in diverse groups, we have to recognize each other's histories (and memories of history) because:

- a. *History can often include the long-term pain of one group oppressing another – which needs to be addressed and forgiven***
- b. Listening to history tells others that we're interested in their pasts
- c. Hearing other people's history can tell us how need to correct their false memories
- d. It's a good psychological exercise

7) _____ The fact that the Rwanda massacre (1994) included cases of Christian killing Christians reflects the following problem:

- a. People just cannot get along
- b. *Christians can overlook the fact that salvation has vertical (towards God) and horizontal (towards others) implications***
- c. None of these people were truly Christians

d. It was all to blame on the colonial powers

8) _____ The phrase “*War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*”

reflects the tendency of people:

a. To fight others

b. *To use violence to find a sense of personal or corporate identity*

c. To start wars with people who are different

d. To look for meaning in war

9) _____ The concept of “united diversity” in the Christian community

refers to:

a. *Christians worshipping and working together in spite of cultural, ethnic and other differences*

b. An explanation of inter-racial marriage

c. People sacrificing their ethnic identity so that everyone can be the same

d. The idea that God’s goal for the church is uniformity

10) _____ Intermarriage between believers (like Moses with his

Cushite wife) can be a reminder that:

a. God wants to create a new human race through believers

b. God wants us to get married out of our race, ethnicity, and class

c. All cultures are equal and we're all part of the human race

d. The movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" expressed God's design for marriage

11) _____ If someone says that "all human beings have an external identity," what is he or she referring to?

a. The person's skin color

b. That as created beings, we derive our identity from something or someone external to ourselves

c. That all people put on a façade and give an external image that's false

d. The way a person dresses according to their culture

12) _____ We are guilty of creating a "Tribal" or "Village" God when we insist on:

a. All worship must be done in our language

b. We pray for the exaltation of our culture (or country) at the expense of others

c. We give others the impression that the language of heaven is our mother tongue

d. Any of these behaviors in the church could express a "tribal" view of God

13) _____ The biblical picture of heaven (Rev. 7:9) seems to indicate that:

- a. White robes are required
- b. *Aspects of various cultures (language, ethnicity, etc.) are preserved in heaven***
- c. We will spend eternity singing
- d. English is the language of heaven

14) _____ One of the most significant beliefs that will help us overcome barriers if we're going to foster cultural and ethnic diversity in the Body of Christ is the belief that:

- a. *Every believer brings his or her unique culture and diverse traits and traditions to the fellowship***
- b. God's design for us in the church is uniformity – all of us the same
- c. The church fellowship meetings must be led in one language only
- d. The church leadership team should be from one culture only

15) _____ When we read the biblical stories where Jesus challenged Jews in relationship to Samaritans, we should look at them as examples of how we should relate to:

- a. People from other countries
- b. People from other language groups

c. *People who are the “Other” with whom we have negative history*

d. People who claim to be related to us

ESSAY QUESTIONS: set #3

1) When Andrew Walls refers to the “universality” and “particularity” of the Gospel in relationship to culture, what is he referring to? Explain.

2) Give four or five examples of practical steps that your church or organizational leadership team can take to build greater cultural diversity into your ministry.

3) When God blessed Abram (Genesis 12:1-3), he told him that he was blessing Abram so that he would be a “blessing to all the nations.” Discuss your thoughts on how increased cultural diversity in the church helps us fulfill this mandate.

4) What is the “Ephesian moment” as described by Andrew Walls?

5) Discuss the pro’s and con’s of the concept of the “Homogenous Unit Principle.”

APPENDIX 3:

PANTA TA ETHNE

The following notes provide a powerful overview of the global mission of God; as a result, we make them available to our students for further personal Bible study.

John Piper⁴⁷² gives a comprehensive overview of the phrase *panta ta ethne* as it appears throughout the New Testament.

- Matthew 24:9 – “You will be hated by *panton ton ethnon* for my sake.”
- Matthew 24:14 (Mark 13: 10) - "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to *pasin tois ethnesin*; and then the end will come."
- Matthew 25:32 - "Before him will be gathered *panta ta ethne*, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." (This context seems to demand the meaning "Gentile individuals" not people groups, because it says that Jesus will "separate them from one another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." This is a reference to individuals who are being judged as the "cursed" and the "righteous" who enter hell or eternal life. Cf. verses 41, 46.)
- Matthew 28:19 - "Make disciples of *panta ta ethne*."

⁴⁷² John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad*, 178-180.

- Mark 11:17 - "My house shall be called a house of prayer for *pasin tois ethnesin*." (This is a quote from Isaiah 56:7. The Hebrew phrase behind *pasin tois ethnesin* is *lekol ha'ammim*, which has to mean "all peoples" rather than "all people.")
- Luke 12:29-30 - "Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be of anxious mind. For *panta ta ethne* of the world seek these things."
- Luke 21:24 - "They will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led captive among *ta ethne panta*." (This warning echoes the words of Ezekiel 32:9 where the corresponding Hebrew word is *goyim* which means nations or people groups. See also Deuteronomy 28:64.)
- Luke 24:47 - "Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to *panta ta ethne*, beginning from Jerusalem."
- Acts 2:5 - "Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from *pantos ethnous* under heaven." (This must clearly refer to people groups rather than individuals. The reference is to various ethnic or national groups from which the diaspora Jews had come to Jerusalem.)
- Acts 10:35 - "In *panti ethnei* any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." (Again this must be a reference to people groups or nations not to individual Gentiles because the individuals who fear God are "in every nation.")

- Acts 14:16 - "In past generations He allowed *panta ta ethne* to walk in their own ways."
- Acts 15:16-17 - "I will rebuild the dwelling of David which has fallen... that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and *panta ta ethne* upon whom is called my name upon them." (I render the verse at the end with this awkwardly literal translation simply to highlight the fact that this is a quotation from Amos 9:12, which in Greek follows the Hebrew with similar literalness. Again the Hebrew word behind *ethne* is *goyim* which means nations or people groups.)
- Acts 17:2 - "And he made, from one, *pan ethnos* of men to live on all the face of the earth." (As with Acts 2:5 and 10:35 this is a reference to "every people group" rather than individuals because it says that every nation is made up "of men." It would not make sense to say that every individual Gentile was made up "of men." Nor does the suggestion of some that it means "the whole human race" fit the meaning of *ethnos* or the context.)
- Romans 1:5 - "We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among *pasin tois ethnesin*."
- Galatians 3:8 - "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall *panta ta ethne* be blessed.'" This is a quote from

Genesis 12:3 which clearly refers to people groups. The corresponding Hebrew phrase, *kol mishpahot*, means all families.

- 2 Timothy 4:17 - "But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the word fully, that *panta ta ethne* might hear it."
- Revelation 12:5 - "She brought forth a male child, one who is to rule *panta ta ethne* with a rod of iron." (Cf. Psalm 2:9. The Old Testament allusion makes it likely that the Old Testament reference to nations in Psalm 2:8 is intended here as well.)
- Revelation 15:4 - "Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord. For thou alone art holy. *Panta ta ethne* shall come and worship thee, for thy judgments have been revealed." (Cf. Psalm 86:9; LXX 85:9. Again the Old Testament allusion suggests a corporate understanding of nations coming to worship the Lord.)
- Out of these 18 uses of *panta ta ethne* (or its variant) only the one in Matthew 25:32 would seem to demand the meaning "Gentile individuals." Three others demand the people group meaning on the basis of the context (Acts 2:5; 10:35; 17:26). Six others require the people group meaning on the basis of the Old Testament connection (Mark 11:17; Luke 21:24; Acts 15:17; Galatians 3:8; Revelation 12:5; 15:4). The remaining eight uses (Matthew 24:9; 24:14; 28:19; Luke 12:30; 24:47; Acts 14:16; 2 Timothy 4:17; Romans 1:5) could go either way" (180).

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VITA

PAUL M. BORTHWICK

BORN: FEBRUARY 20, 1954

PLACE OF BIRTH: ARLINGTON, MA

EDUCATION:

- 1) Bachelors degree in Business Administration (Management) from the University of Massachusetts (Amherst) - 1976.
- 2) Masters of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, MA -1980.

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY WORK:

Doctor of Ministry in Cross-Cultural Studies commenced 2002

ANTICIPATED GRADUATION: MAY 2007

CONTACT INFORMATION

1 Minuteman Lane,
Lexington, MA 02421-6726
Phone: 781-862-9499
Mobile : 617-513-7406
Email: pborthwick@compuserve.com
Alternate emails: pborthwick@rcn.com,
pborthwick@daintl.org or
Paul.Borthwick@gordon.edu.
Website: www.borthwicks.org